

Encyclopedia of Indian Religions

*Series Editor: Arvind Sharma*

SPRINGER  
REFERENCE

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair *Editor*

# Sikhism

---

# Encyclopedia of Indian Religions

**Series Editor**  
Arvind Sharma

---

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Editor

# Sikhism

With 64 Figures

 Springer

*Editor*

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages  
and Cultures  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI, USA

ISBN 978-94-024-0845-4      ISBN 978-94-024-0846-1 (eBook)  
ISBN 978-94-024-0847-8 (print and electronic bundle)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0846-1>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016955802

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2017

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer Science+Business Media B.V.  
The registered company address is: Van Godewijckstraat 30, 3311 GX Dordrecht, The Netherlands



---

## Preface

Although the Sikh tradition has been practiced actively for about 550 years, sustained academic interest and study of Sikhism is a relatively recent development. For instance, one of the earliest academic journals dedicated to studying Sikhism, *The Journal of Sikh Studies*, began publication in February 1974. Half a decade later, the spreading international interest in Sikhism can be seen in its infancy in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley, 1979). This international interest coincided with a change in immigration policies in North America that enabled many Sikhs to migrate to places like California, Michigan, and British Columbia in growing numbers. As Sikhs were highly visible but a relatively unknown people, many early studies focused on the nature of Sikhism through two main questions: What is Sikhism? Who are the Sikhs?

Almost 40 years after its international recognition as a field of study, Sikh Studies represents a rapidly growing discourse with a respectable number of scholarly publications occurring across many disciplines through books and journals on this subject. Introductory textbooks in religious studies routinely include Sikhism as a distinct religious tradition, and recent years have seen the creation of standalone textbook introductions to Sikhism. However, despite this monumental shift in the body of knowledge on the Sikh tradition, there remains a dearth of reference material that would facilitate informed interdisciplinary engagement with the central aspects of Sikhism.

Encyclopedias of religion are nothing new; the *Encyclopedia of Islam* was first published between 1913 and 1936 following increased interest in Islam and Muslims during the nineteenth century. Coming after the initial growth in interest about Sikhism in the twentieth century, it is therefore fitting that a stand-alone encyclopedic resource be devoted to the Sikh tradition. This particular volume is not the first attempt to produce encyclopedic resources about the Sikh tradition. One of the earliest and important encyclopedic resources is Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh*, first published in 1930. While Mahan Kosh continues to be one of the richest and valuable resources for learning about Sikh tradition, its lexicon, personalities, places, history, and artifacts, its accessibility is limited to those who know modern and classical Punjabi language. Another major encyclopedic work is the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Sikhism* published by Punjabi University, Patiala, in 1986 under the editorship of Professor Harbans Singh. This important work has helped to bring in-depth knowledge of Sikhs and Sikhism to an

English-speaking audience around a broad number of topics including a wealth of information regarding events, ideas, and personages central to Sikh history.

Compared to these pioneering and monumental works, the present volume in its current form is more focussed upon entries that pertain to the conceptual frames and important thinkers needed to engage the Sikh tradition critically. The aim is meant to provide a critical resource to scholars interested in Sikh intellectual history and philosophy, not least because it comprises one section, albeit a distinct and important section, of a very different project, namely, the *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*. In its current form, there are approximately 100 entries in this volume written by a wide range of scholars. The entries cover some of the most important topics necessary for understanding the nature of Sikhism. Unlike other encyclopedias, however, we have tried to incorporate more thematically oriented entries which collectively give the reader a better picture of the fluid and everchanging nature of contemporary Sikhism and its relations with the other societies and contexts. In this sense, our aim was, to some extent at least, to release this volume from a general limitation of the encyclopedia genre as a whole, which has been the tendency to fix its subject matter into a past time frame.

Fortunately, in this endeavor we are aided by recent advancements in publishing technology which have allowed our publisher, Springer, to make use of digital technology that allows entries to be updated and published on a digital platform as opposed to being restricted to the printed book. Once the volume is published (both in print and static e-version), it is moved to the digital platform where it becomes available for updates and expansion. Needless to say, this helps to evolve not only the form but also the very concept of an encyclopedia in the sense that it can be periodically updated with newly commissioned articles that have not materialized in this current edition. Given that individual entries can also be updated online enabling more up-to-date editions of the encyclopedia to be printed much sooner than was previously the case, the benefits to readers and contributing authors of this encyclopedia section are obvious to see. We therefore urge readers as well as our contributors to see this encyclopedia as the first stage in an interactive and evolving organic process of knowledge production, which may involve more contributors in years to come.

MI, USA

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
(Editor)

---

## Series Editor



**Arvind Sharma** Formerly of the I.A.S., Arvind Sharma (b.1940) is the Birks Professor of Comparative Religion in the School of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He has also taught at various universities in Australia and the United States and has published extensively in the fields of comparative religion and Indology. He is currently the general editor of *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions* (Springer, 2017) and his forthcoming works include *Orientalism Two*, *Our Civilization*, and *How to Read the Manusmṛti*.

---

## About the Editor



**Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair** teaches at the University of Michigan where he is Associate Professor of Sikh Studies. He holds doctoral degrees in Philosophy/Religion and Chemistry. Broadly grounded in South Asian studies his research interests include comparative and continental philosophy, translation studies, postcolonial theory, secularism and the theoretical study of religion and violence. His book publications include *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation* (Columbia University Press, 2009); *Secularism and Religion-Making* (with Markus Dressler, Oxford 2011); *Sikhism: A Guide For the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury 2013), a major volume of translations *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from Sikh Scripture* (with Christopher Shackle, Routledge 2005). He is founding editor of the journal *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory* published by Routledge.

---

## Assistant Editor



**Harjeet Singh Grewal** recently completed his dissertation entitled *Janamsākhī: Retracing Networks of Interpretation* (2017), at the University of Michigan in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures. Harjeet is interested in questions from the Philosophy of Language pertaining to meaning, reference, translation, and textuality. He grounds these in South Asian devotional traditions focussing especially upon Sikhism. His work critically engages devotionalism by interrogating contemporary ideas about devotional archives and notions of textual materiality. Harjeet's interests and writings extend to questions about postsecularism, critical religion, diaspora, and literature.

---

## Contributors

**Pal Ahluwalia** Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation), University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Hampshire, UK

**Gurnam Kaur Bal** Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

**Himadri Banerjee** Department of History, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

**Balbinder Singh Bhogal** Department of Religion, S.K.K. Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, USA

**Verne A. Dusenbery** Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN, USA

**Louis E. Fenech** Department of History, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

**Manjit Singh Gill** No5 Chambers, London, UK

**Rahuldeep Singh Gill** California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, CA, USA

**Harjeet Singh Grewal** Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**Michael Hawley** Religious Studies, Mount Royal University, Calgary, AB, Canada

Religious Studies, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada

**Randeep Hothi** Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**Prabhjap Singh Jutla** Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, UK

**Virinder S. Kalra** Sociology, SOSS, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

**Tavleen Kaur** University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

**Nirinjan Khalsa** Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, USA

**Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair** Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**Navdeep Mandair** Independent Scholar, Coventry, UK

Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Birmingham,  
Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK

**Anne Murphy** Department of Asian Studies, UBC Asian Centre, University  
of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Michael Nijhawan** Department of Sociology, York University, Toronto, ON,  
Canada

**Davinder Singh Panesar** Institute of Mindfulness and Transpersonal  
Psychology, Barcelona, Spain

**Susan Prill** Department of Religious Studies, Juniata College, Huntingdon,  
PA, USA

**Navtej K. Purewal** Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of  
Manchester, Manchester, UK

**Jasdev Singh Rai** Sikh Human Rights Group, British Sikh Consultative  
Forum, Southall, Middlesex, UK

**G. S. Sahota** Department of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz,  
CA, USA

**Christopher Shackle** SOAS, University of London, London, UK

**Katy Pal Sian** School of Social Sciences, Sociology, University of  
Manchester, UK

**Harpreet Singh** Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University,  
Cambridge, MA, USA

**I. J. Singh** New York University, New York, NY, USA

**Pashaura Singh** Department of Religious Studies, University of California,  
Riverside, CA, USA

**Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh** Department of Religious Studies, Colby  
College, Waterville, ME, USA

**Jasjit Singh** Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of  
Leeds, Leeds, UK

**Sunit Singh** Divinity School, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

**Hardip Singh Syan** SOAS, University of London, Russell Square, London, UK

**Opinderjit Kaur Takhar** Department of Religious Studies, University of  
Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK

**Darshan S. Tatla** Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

---

# A

---

## Accuracy

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Acquaintance

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Actuality

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Aesthetics (Sikhism)

Michael Nijhawan  
Department of Sociology, York University,  
Toronto, ON, Canada

## Synonyms

[Art](#); [Embodiment](#); [Image](#); [Music](#); [Performance](#);  
[Rasa](#); [Sensory experience](#)

## Definition

Aesthetic experience is defined by the imaginative capacity to grasp and experience the world holistically based on a nonconceptual encounter of complex forms in art and nature. It is an experience that is invested with the potential to achieve spontaneous breakthroughs, transformations that tend to be acknowledged as significant in a *generic* sense. Aesthetic experience is at the same time defined by a paradoxical relationship to its object that results from the dispensation of both, the laws of rational thought and the sensual, insofar as both structure desire and the realms of the intentional acting subject. [40] It assumes a specific form of surrender of the ego-self and opens a space for creativity and imagination in contradistinction to common regimes of good taste and consumption.

As an intellectual field of reflecting the relevance of aesthetic experience in relation to art, politics, and religion, aesthetics is limited neither to a general theory of art and the sublime nor to an art-historical canon reflecting a given set of expressive art genres. Whereas the theory of aesthetics in the West has undoubtedly evolved in tandem with the modern conceptualization of art as autonomous in contrast to its prior canonization, institutionalization, and subordination to normative regimes of representation, the autonomy of art has lost much of its promise against the force of capitalism and the political upheavals of the twentieth



century. These have also impacted the way in which the emancipatory potential of art has hitherto been assessed. The recent critical revision of Western aesthetic theory reflects the changes by which the relationship between the autonomy and sovereignty of art is problematized today. Jacques Ranciere, to name one influential thinker, defines aesthetics therefore in an a priori sense, as the 'forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community". ([36], p. 13)

Whereas there are discernible trends to on the one hand ground aesthetics in social relations and yet on the other avoid the earlier functionalist or idealist framings, the question of how modes of visibility are constituted and how individuals and audiences are aesthetically enthralled still depends on historically specific, albeit not unrelated, cultural languages of aesthetic experience. As further outlined below, the Indian language and theory of *rasas* and *bhavas* is one such important case that has to be taken into consideration when theorizing aesthetics in Sikhism.

## Introductory Notes

Whereas there is an emerging literature on Sikh *arts*, conducted mostly from an art-historical point of view, [5, 13, 27, 41] and whereas there exists a still understudied expertise on Sikh *sabad kirtan* [21, 25] and other performative traditions associated with Sikhism, [30, 32] most of these works have looked at aesthetic aspects as illuminative of spiritual registers or treated them as secondary to the hermeneutics of the *Adi Granth* (and to some extent, the *Dasam Granth*) as the central text(s) through which to approach the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. (for a critique: [4]) Attempts to think more systematically about aesthetic experience in regard to the performance of Sikh religious texts, [30] or in relation to other fields of artistic and cultural practice, are far and few between. In general, there has been an emphasis in Sikh Studies on theology, history, and interpretations of the *content* of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus which, despite the inherited ways that are acknowledged

as saying something about the *how* of musical recitation, poetic arrangement, and practical orientation in performance spaces, have often been presented at the expense of seeing a more systematic connection between art, aesthetics, and other registers of value. Lately, scholars have identified the need to conduct more research in these areas, [24, 31] but a major work on aesthetics in Sikhism is still lacking.

This poses a particular challenge for this entry, for it cannot begin with a taken-for-granted set of hypotheses and findings. Instead it attempts a comprehensive and comparative portrayal of Sikh aesthetic practices beyond theological, musicological, or art-historical considerations. Rather than focus on Indian drama theory or classical musical traditions, [21, 25] the interest here is on delineating the connections between aspects of philosophy, broader historical developments, and artistic forms and practices that delineate characteristic aspects of Sikh religious orientation and everyday practice. The scheme that is proposed for this purpose organizes scholarly contributions in and beyond the field of Sikh Studies in such a way that it hopefully facilitates directions of a future and more broadly conceived theory of aesthetics in Sikhism. It reflects how art and aesthetic practices and configurations mediate a field of specific relations, orientations, and encounters that have never stood in isolation and that have, per definition, been open and adaptive to social, religious, and political change. This can be well demonstrated in the context of Sikh religious and cultural formations without thereby losing sight of the originality and integrity of Sikh tradition(s). Before embarking on such a discussion, we need to first briefly address the apparently straightforward yet notoriously difficult to define, aspect of what is actually meant by "aesthetic experience" in its relation to or distinction from "religious" or "spiritual experience."

## Aesthetic Paradox, Intersubjective Relations, and Internal Contestations

This issue has been widely discussed by key thinkers of the (post-) enlightenment where despite

substantial disagreements over the question of art's autonomy from metaphysical speculation, scholars have shared the idea that aesthetic experience guides human beings to a *different order* of encountering the world through and beyond any specific faculty of the senses. The critical point has been how to interpret this "different order," an idea that in the context of modernity has oscillated between Kant's [19] promises of a shared "common sense" (*Gemeinsinn*) for a future democratic order, to notions of "subversion" [1] and "disaster", [23] through which post-World War II thinkers have tried to retain something of (or altogether reject) the promises of social and political emancipation through aesthetic experience. This is also the context in which the metaphysical elevation of art has found a critical impasse. [28] A different development can be observed in recent years in the field of religious studies where, informed by philosophical debates on the aesthetic and pictorial turn [7, 29] and the new anthropology of the senses, [17] the "aesthetic dimension of religious experience" has received renewed attention. This can, for example, be observed in regard to new work on the aesthetic reception of the specific religious texts [22, 43] or on aesthetic experience as providing a path for reassessing self-other relations in the context of interreligious or interfaith agendas. [6]

The second point to be mentioned concerns the *intersubjective dimension* of the art process. The connection between relational and aesthetic concepts is of particular relevance in Sikhism, for it places a strong focus on congregational performances and social engagements oriented towards the common good. The intersubjective dimension in aesthetic experience relates to issues such as love, compassion, and empathy in the suffering of others (a point that has also framed much of the contemporary debate on the politics of aesthetics in regard to the power of the televised image) [15] and the shared experience of emotive states in performance spaces (as, for instance, in concerts or liturgies). Yet it also applies more generally to the specific relationship between "art producers" (musicians, singers, painters, writers, actors, etc.) on the one hand and "art receivers" (listeners, audiences, viewers, readers, spectators, etc.) on the other. [10] Whereas eighteenth- to

nineteenth-century scholars and dramaturges in Europe were overly concerned with the indeterminacy by which the mutual relationship between artists and audiences "impacted" the quality of an art work, the twentieth century has seen a fundamental change in that respect. [10] This change expressed itself in the recognition of the manifold ways in which aesthetic processes have been capable of realizing particular modes and understandings of who constitutes an "actor" or an "audience." The roles and interactions between each position have been seen to shift and interlace. The indeterminacy of the roles contributing to an art process has thus become a distinctive hallmark of contemporary understandings of creativity in and through aesthetic experience. Importantly, this has also opened the perspective on processes that transgress the boundaries of the canonized Western art forms that until quite recently used to provide the typical reference points for aesthetic theories. Vice versa, modern conceptualizations and institutionalizations of performance modes in music and drama have inflected Sikh artistic practices, reaching over into domains of Sikh popular art as well. [27]

A third important point is that the status as well as the contours of what defines aesthetics has been subject to *ever-new contestations from within the practical domains of art* and, also externally, in respect to how, as a system of symbolic relations and identifications of/through sensory modalities, these domains would acquire or lose their force and plausibility in relation to other societal and political domains. It generally holds that there are bound to be conflicts, due to differences in individual orientation, social stratification, and political representation, over which evaluations qualify as aesthetic experience as compared to other registers of value. These are often key points in religious debates as well. From a historical perspective, these changes can be observed in regard to how they have impacted possibilities for the aesthetic production of materiality enabled within social and political configurations. [10] Art has re-imagined our futures and contributed to unleash social and political transformation. Yet specific forms and articulations of art have also lost this force and appeal at given moments of

time. The same holds true for the notion of aesthetic autonomy. Whereas, for instance, the Kantian “disinterested” character of aesthetic autonomy (the “free play of the imagination”) was once set against the inherited frameworks of religious ritual and thus linked to a new concept of subjectivity understood to be “free of the constraints of religion,” this notion of “disinterestedness” has lost much of its appeal in a capitalist system in which art has been commodified and mainstream forms of cultural consumptions have clearly impacted the meaning of aesthetics itself.

There have also been attempts made by artists to use forms of (e.g. painful) embodiment that were previously linked to religious contexts (ritual). The decontextualized use of these practices has in turn been celebrated as pushing the boundaries of what accounts for aesthetic experience. ([10], p. 157) In contexts of Sikh religious practice too, there continue to be shifts in aesthetic judgment that, for example, relate to the issue of unbroken readings of texts that some claim to have transformative power precisely because of the aesthetic process induced by it, whereas others have lamented this particular aspect of performance as empty repetition or ritualization. [30]

Fourth, and against the background of such examples, *repetition as linked to ritual, liturgy, religious text, and doctrine has evolved as a problem category for modern aesthetic theory* with its emphasis on modalities of crisis – irritations, disturbances, collisions, and subversions of reason and truth claims or between reason and sensory regimes. To circumvent the resulting problem of assuming a linear and normative connection in the sense of inscribing a particular secular metapolitics into art processes that forever exclude alternative visions, a few more considerations are required here. Thus, if repetition is understood as a patterned yet constantly *evolving* mode of relating to self and the world through which a particular, collectively shared way of life is distinguished in its mode of “doing” and “making,” then this mode is itself adaptive and indicative of change. Whether it is through artistic or other processes, repetition as a mode of orienting to the world remains interlaced with configurations of power inasmuch as it opens spaces for radical transformation and critical

dissent. Recent advances in the study of Sikh philosophy and historiography show how such configurations have played out, historically, in favor of a reification of a form of repetition that lends itself to a narrow identity politics. [24] The fixation on the transcendental and the idea of monotheism has however not led to a complete undoing of other forms of repetition. According to recent critiques, a “re-reading and reinterpretation of Sikh scripture” in its practical dimension and relatedness to the world, allows to divest aesthetic practices from meanings of the sublime. Instead such meanings of repetition would retain a radical otherness in their very aesthetic dimension, will say in the way in which repetition enables forms of (self-) reflexivity. (24: 356ff) Rather than seeing crisis and repetition as opposed within a theory of aesthetics, the specific engagement with Sikh aesthetics posits the need of studying the relationship between aesthetic and religious concepts outside of the common binaries of “religion” against “secularism”. [24]

This point can also be reflected from the broader point of view of how sensory regimes have emerged as critical interventions in modernity. Whereas, on the one hand, modern aesthetic theory has effectively debunked the normative principle of mimesis through which Christianity and visual art were previously tied together until the Renaissance, it has also carried within it and to other places of cultural and religious encounters, hierarchical notions regarding the value of the senses that, for instance, have placed vision over hearing and posited certain practices of sensuality to be “incongruous with practices of erudition and pious contemplation”. ([17], p. 14) The effects of such attributions in contexts of colonialism have had a lasting legacy. On the other hand, the critique of ocularcentrism has also been part and parcel of the project of Orientalism in its attempt to rediscover and reconfigure non-Western arts and aesthetic systems, whether it is in regard to ideologies of sacred sound ([24], p. 331) or the reevaluation of the theory of *rasa* in the Western context. [12, 16, 26, 33] Well-known examples that include Richard Schechner’s “rasaesthetics” have, for example, been criticized for the problematic juxtaposition and translation of Indian aesthetic theories but also for the eclecticism by

which they are marketed, as intercultural art products and performances, to the “global village”. [26]

Fifth, with these caveats in mind, *the theory of rasa can still provide a first and important avenue through which to introduce the notions of “aesthetic experience” and “aesthetic breakthroughs,”* both in relation to the spiritual aspirations outlined in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the broader cultural field of artistic practices associated with Sikh tradition(s) today. The theory of *rasa*, which found its first written exploration in the *Natyasastra* (a dramaturgical treatise attributed to Bharata 200–500 C.E.), delineates how basic emotional constituents (*bhavas*) are modified in drama performance as generalized “moods,” “emotional tones,” or “sentiments” to be experienced by spectators, who have learned to cultivate and enjoy these complex aesthetic states known as *rasas*. [2, 3, 11, 12, 16, 20, 26, 33, 42, 43] What is loosely translated here as “emotional tone” or “moods” are rather unhappy terms for *rasa* as a concept of aesthetic judgment meant to facilitate and, in the end, offer a “taste” of higher-level spiritual breakthroughs, [16] which, especially in regard to the ninth *rasa* (*santa rasa*), has triggered debates among Indologists considering the status of this as aesthetic or metaphysic category (bordering the experience of *moksha* or liberation). [2, 12] What most commentators agree with is that *rasa* is distinct from the experience of transient emotions (*vyabicaribhavas*) as well as enduring emotions (*sthayibhava*); insofar as in the experience of *rasa*, the experience is “freed from the contingent qualifications of concrete situations” thus bringing the participant “reflexively into contact with the generalized possibility of experience itself”, ([12]: 187) a condition that has also been referred to as “*rasatvam*”. ([12], p. 191)

Whereas there is no direct link between the *Natyasastra* and any particular performance tradition in India or elsewhere, it has widely served in Indian contexts as a template through which to grasp the concept of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic relish in performance processes that bridge what is typically divided in the West as “secular” versus “religious” spheres of life. Abhinavagupta in the eleventh century was decisive in expanding *rasa* theory to the imaginative capacity of poetry to induce *rasa* in the reader, [2, 11, 12, 16] and this

capacity of poetry and sung hymns has also been informative for *rasa*’s employment in Sikh tradition.

Based on these qualifications, the four subsequent sections reflect central tenets of Sikh artistic forms and aesthetic practices insofar as they can be set into relation with a general theory of performative aesthetics (10): The first, “Between soundness and Configurations of Sound” will problematize sonic form in regards to the mediation and sedimentation of affects and emotions in religious rituals formed around music. The second, “Between Spatiality and Configurations of Space” takes an interest in tracing the connections between spatial practices and representations that connect to a historical genealogy of aesthetic forms. The third rubric, “Between Corporeality and Configurations of the Body” shall focus on the relationship between aesthetic and spiritual experiences, insofar as their everyday articulation depends on a non-dualistic notion of body/mind. Finally, “Temporality and Configurations of Time” probes an inquiry into the conditions through which aesthetic modes of sound, vision and space emerge as transitory, thus shedding light on one of the key concepts in Sikh philosophical thought: time and memory as both permanent and impermanent.”

## Between Soundness and Configurations of Sound

Like many of their counterparts in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century North Indian religious movements, the Sikh Gurus emphasized inclusiveness and commonly understood aesthetic and emotional idioms, rather than advancing elite esotericism that would maintain strict hierarchies in spiritual and aesthetic education and orientation. The most immediate connection between *rasa* and Sikh religious practices is to be found in the area of poetry, music, and devotional singing. [21, 25, 37, 38] The textual corpus of the *Adi Granth* is composed by different hymns and poems that are daily sung and recited in both individual and congregational settings. The musical setting of these hymns and their organization in different *ragas* attests to several facts: First, the Sikh

Gurus were not only renowned poets of their times displaying a great sense of musical sophistication too, they also emphasize the fact that the word of the Adi Granth was itself *revealed* in musical form. [37] Second, the subsequent organization and canonization of the Adi Granth attests to the importance of *rasas*, which require a correct performance in *sabad kirtan*, specified in the titles (*sirlekh*) in addition to information on chorus, verse, meter, and the overall feeling tone (*ragdhyān*). ([21], p. 260) The fact that the Sikh Gurus sang hymns that overlapped with the liturgical, Sufi, and folk traditions further testifies to their inclusiveness in terms of regional performance idioms, aesthetic conventions, as well as the specific selection of *rasas* from the entire catalogue of Indian drama theory:

“Within an overall feeling of *bhakti rasa* (devotion), *sabad* texts speak of love, longing, union, wonder, and virtue. These are guides for the music chosen to sing a particular *sabad*. Overarching these emotions is the dominant aesthetic of the Guru Granth encapsulated in the concepts of *sabad surat* [*sabad-attuned consciousness*], *sahaj dhyān* [*serene contemplation*], and *Har rasa* [*divine rasa*].” ([21], p. 266)

Whereas the *sabad kirtan* tradition is rather unambiguous in prescribing and performing this musical dimension of the text and engages in continuing conversations over the specific requirements of musical material in this respect, controversies exist in regard to what status the meaning of “sacred sound” should have. This relates to musicological concerns about the rupture and modernization of the *kirtan* tradition [21] and extends to the ideologically charged debates over whether or not the concept of a “primacy of sound” that has its roots in Vedic thought should have any place in Sikhism at all. [24] What ensues from this are a number of questions that concern the very heart of how aesthetic experience is framed in Sikhism. Thus, should we understand *shabad kirtan* as ontologically related to the experience of bliss, or is it to be seen primarily as a medium or vehicle to approach spiritual notions through an intermediate cognitive state? In regard to practices such as the *akhand path* (unbroken recitations) and *nam simran* (a form of repetition

of the name), what are the associations between concepts of exact repetitions of sound and notions of sacredness, and are those associations commensurable with the actual teachings of the Sikh Gurus? ([24], p. 331) What is the place of art (music, aesthetic pleasure experienced in *sabad kirtan*) in regard to the spiritual experience of the “unknowable divinity” evoked in the name (*nam*)? If the purpose of *sabad kirtan* is the experience of *nam*, is this an indication of the transcendental orientation of the practice, or is *nam* itself an “empty signifier” in regard to metaphysical meanings and in fact grounded/grounding everyday reality?. ([24], p. 376)

If such questions continue to be the subject of vigorous debates and require more detailed research and contemplation, the emphasis on the nonconceptual aspects of consciousness in the practice of *sabad kirtan* underlines the intention by the Sikh Gurus to work towards a lasting transformative effect in regard to the shaping of a self that has moved from the maintenance of ego-boundaries to the cultivation of love for the other. This clearly surpasses what is usually involved in considerations over the “learned” aspects of aesthetic relish and judgment in Indian aesthetic theory.

The connection between soundness and sound as something that is generated in performance and experienced as temporary and transient to a concept of lasting self-transformations then ultimately cannot be determined by formalistic considerations of original musical notation and exploration. The very acknowledgment of time as leading to ever-new occasions for self-realization and congregational manifestation necessitates a degree of flexibility and adaptability to changing configurations of both the conditions of sound production (as evidenced in changed technologies of sound and instrumentation) and processes of hearing, which despite the centrality of performance spaces: have ultimately changed due to the advent of industrialization and the new possibilities of production and dissemination of sound in the digital age.

It is important to understand that these new configurations have lastingly transformed the institutional landscape of Sikh music making and listening, yet the effects cannot be simply



read on a template of cultural pessimism (lamenting the loss of earlier traditions). In fact, inasmuch as modernity has produced ruptures, it has also generated new opportunities in the conditions and cultivations of listening on the spatiotemporal axis. This applies to the harmonium-tabla orchestrated *sabad kirtan* but also other musical forms taking root in folk traditions, such as *dhad-sarangi* music. The *dhadi* tradition is in fact one example through which to grasp historically not only the processes of institutionalization of entire repertoires along with the signification of sounds in relation to specific *rasas* (*sant/bhakti rasa* as distinct from a folk rendering of *bir rasa*) but also the broader social and political implications of soundscapes insofar as the sedimentation of specific forms, such as *sabad kirtan* versus *dhadi* or *bhangra* in social memory, each assumes different social categorizations and affective responses. [31, 32] In fact, the relation between social categorization, sound, and affect [34] appears interesting insofar it expresses, within and against specific configurations of sound, the wealth of ideas, predicaments, and existential conditions, even within a religious formation that has as one of its distinct achievements the overcoming of discriminations based on caste, creed, and gender.

### Between Spatiality and Configurations of Space

Each “dramatic” performance generates specific spatial conditions and experiences of space that are grounded in (audiences’, witnesses’) bodies and in this way invested with transformative capacities that range from the ludic to the spiritual, often conflating several levels. These processes are per definition transitory, fleeting, and fragile in terms of the lastingness of the bonds created therein. But the relationship between the aesthetic productions of spatiality has to be looked at from a broader point of view that entails the sedimentation of everyday movements of bodies and objects into patterns and pathways, their relationship becoming manifest in spatial relations and recognizable beyond the moment of aesthetic breakthrough. Human beings’

relationship to landscape and architectural form is always aesthetically mediated. The “doings” and “makings” of a community become interlaced with the aesthetics of memory and politics. Within longer-lasting configuration and composition of landscape and architecture, we also discover evidence of the pluralism of aesthetic tastes and experiences. Ruins, architectures and representations that date back to times of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century reflect the specific changes and emphases that are associated with each of the Sikh Gurus, such as the construction of ponds (*sarovars*) that points to the then emergent structure of Sikh ritual and pilgrimage in which water played a special role. [35] The production and illumination of Sikh scriptural manuscripts also provide important insights into how the historical inclusion of various art traditions and patronage forms provides pathways for understanding the relationship between text, space, and image in the periods preceding the iconoclastic urge of late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Sikh reformists. As these materials are full of space metaphors, allegories of landscape, and references to non-Sikh religious figures and stories, they provide a rich ground for studying the aesthetics of Sikh scripture beyond its immediate use as liturgical script. [9]

Early twentieth-century modernism can be characterized by its attempts to erase and homogenize these configurations of space, image, and text. [41] In the wake of industrialization and nationalism, recurrent, monotonous arrangements have replaced complex spaces of social intermingling and the singularities of landscape; marked boundaries are apparent where once were found fluid boundaries. The partition of the region in 1947 has inscribed memories of violence and suffering onto the new cartographies of nations, whereas the green revolution has leveled the landscape of farming and agriculture in such poisonous ways, in regard to biodiversity, sociality, and political relations, that it has in a profound sense led to new “partitioning of the sensible” [36] that entrenches the social and religious fabric alike. The very experience of landscape, sound, and vision has been altered by these events. Two more issues of contemporary currency must be added in this respect: One is the

militarization of Punjab as a border region in the wake of Indo-Pakistan border disputes and in the context of state violence in response to the Sikh separatist movement in the 1980s and early 1990s. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the shift in connotation and sound idiom in the realm of popular musical forms. [32, 34] The second issue relates to post-1947 out-migration and the transnationalization of Punjab as a social and cultural space, in the context of which the Sikh diaspora has contributed to the ideological, economical, and cultural transfers which made an impact on the social imagination and aesthetic orientation.

In diaspora contexts, one finds how architecture, place, and processes of emplacement are, in their aesthetic dimension, crucially linked to political processes of inclusion and exclusion. This can be shown in regards to debates over the ritualization of Sikh practices as an alleged consequence of “Hinduization”. The link between aesthetics and a politics of place are also manifest in controversies over the building of Sikh gurdwaras in contexts of urban planning and multiculturalism. In both cases, diasporic conditions ultimately affect artistic and form-giving practices as well as aesthetic experiences on the part of the community (*sangat*). Vice versa it is the new diasporic investment in pilgrimage travel, the sponsoring of specific rituals such as akhand path recitations at the Golden Temple or the creation of Sikh heritage parks that lastingly alter social perceptions and aesthetic evaluations of ritual, architecture, and landscape.

The shifting gaze that can be perceived in regard to spatial representation and the organization of the visual field has had significant repercussions on the popularization of iconographic forms and images, as attested in the evolving codes and codifications of popular art from early hagiography to bazaar prints, [27] an issue that is further extending today into the realm of digital art production. The question here is not just one of the changing technologies and conventions of representation. There have continued to be such changes, from the days when Kashmiri artists had illuminated copies of the Adi Granth [9] to the

changes induced by the advent of modern photography and portrait art in nineteenth-century Punjab. [14] Whereas the modern optic has led to significant changes in the role and status of the image, it has also become interlaced with the deeper symbolic layers of representing martyrdom, trauma, and death. [32]

### **Between the Bodily and Configurations of the Body**

The issue of visual representation and trauma points to the place of the Sikh body as a site that is inscribed with deep symbolic layers. Public debate hinges on the symbolic dimension of, the male Sikh body in regard to the requirements of the 5 Ks as signifiers for *Khalsa* identity, the entailments of legal definitions of membership hinging on the dastar/turban, and the broader social meanings of unshorn hair that, especially among Sikh youth, has become widely debated issue. In terms of (the politics of) aesthetics, only few attempts have been made to go beyond this framework. However, new research has traced the genealogy and instability of the Sikh turban as a modern signifier, defined by discursive and affective modes of identification. [18] If violence, discrimination, and suffering bodies have acquired a monumental place in the construction of Sikh heritage and the representation of the Sikh body in a post-1984 context, loving bodies have continued to be a problem category. Here we have to specifically mention the feminist critique of patriarchal structures and the alternative interpretation of a Sikh religious aesthetics advanced by this body of scholarship. [39]

Feminist critique is not alone in arguing that the everyday dimension of the bodily in its aesthetic dimension is hardly accounted for in Sikh Studies. This is due to the fact that everyday bodily enactments are subsumed under concepts of religion, overlooked for their ordinariness in distinction from the “corporeal metaphysics” of the venerated book, [39] or overdetermined by its religious identity in regard to proper forms of conduct and ritual comportments. [30] However, the issue of gendered division, social disposition,

and affect can be understood to be already inscribed in everyday aesthetic experiences, insofar as they say something about the singularity as well as diversification of each particular place and process of place making. Depending on place, constituency, and the role of critical public discourse, significant differences exist in the very way in which bodily configurations hinge on religious space and architecture. Beyond ideological contestations over forms of conduct and symbolic representation, there is something to be considered of how socially situated bodies move and experience ritual and non-ritual aspects of everyday Sikh practice, depending on modes of accessibility and vulnerability that are mediated by interactive processes on a micro- and macro-level.

There is also something to be said on the issue of bodily transformation as indicated above in regard to concepts of *bhakti rasa/sahaj* in practicing *sabad kirtan*. Whereas the debates over the symbolic layers of Sikh bodies evolve around matters of identity, membership, exclusion/inclusion, and legal rights in the context of state-minority discourse, the issue of mind-body states in *sabad kirtan* and other spiritual processes is charged with significations that bring the relation between art and religion again into sharp relief. Thus, much of what is written on the mystical experience in *sabad kirtan* hinges on a transcendental mysticism in which the elevated bodily state [25] or the cutting oneself off from social reality [30] is assumed to be the guiding principle, much in the way Durkheimian theories of ritual have postulated an ontological difference between everyday and ritual experience of time. However, it is precisely this underlying idea of a radical transformation between the “profane” and “sacred” that is fundamentally challenged by the Sikh Gurus themselves, [24, 37] for which one has to reconsider the broader implications of concepts of time and temporality for a theory of aesthetics in Sikhism.

## Temporality and Configurations of Time

In fact, all issues discussed so far hinge upon notions of time and temporality. On the one

hand, the ritual marking of time occurs through artistic forms and practices and in this way affects daily practices, whether it is the *nitnem*, *gurdwara*, or life cycle rituals or the many seasonal festivals and anniversaries celebrated by Sikhs worldwide. On the other hand, aesthetic processes of whatever kind and in whatever circumstance unfold *in time* and acquire their meaning and signification exclusively therein. Language and representation can only insufficiently recapture what has subjectively and objectively occurred in experience itself. This applies to the question of transience and the fleetingness of the aesthetic moment as well as to issues of time consciousness and memory, both of which are pervasive themes in Sikh scripture. The Sikh Gurus emphasize the paradoxical nature of time as, “the matrix in which the self is trapped” and time, “given that the locus of one’s experience in time is the body, time is as a gift”. ([37], p. 21) Many hymns therefore address the issue of death, the impermeability of time, and the necessity for abandoning forms of self-attachment and the grieving for things lost. [37]

There is a key difference, however, in thinking about grief as resulting from self-induced barriers of the mind or as upheavals that confronts the self with the darkness of the world. Whereas the teaching of the Sikh Gurus proscribe a way of overcoming this darkness, the recognition of pain as having a social dimension is equally significant in contemplating about Sikh ethical teachings more generally insofar as it relates to issues of compassion and empathy. In that sense, it resonates a theme that has been central to the theory of *rasa* since Abhinavagupta, where similar ideas on “time’s impermanence as our own essence” [16] has been linked to the role of unconscious memory traces in aesthetic experience. The conceptual template that has been used in this context presumes that

“the elements of resuscitated memory enable one who experiences an artwork or other affect producing stimuli to recognize the convergence of one’s own experience and the emotion one encounters in another. This recognition of common emotional experience depends on moving beyond a narrowly



egoistic outlook to a more generalized, transpersonal sense of the emotion. One interprets the perceived emotion as an instance of a type and recognizes its common character with one's own remembered emotion, thereby undercutting one's sense of personally owning one's emotion. This breakthrough is essential for *rasa* to occur". [16]

It needs to be emphasized, however, that in Sikhism this notion of *rasa* is not an end in itself. The more significant point seems to consist in how Sikh philosophical ideas on this subject matter would relate to contemporary theories and languages of suffering that have been instrumental for the very concept of individuality, self, and subjecthood. [15] Contemporary expressions by Sikh artists are deeply entrenched in this modern configuration of suffering, memory, and subjecthood, which is also reflected in the legacy of themes of martyrdom and violence in contemporary Sikh visual art in the post-1984 context. [32] Whereas one can identify a certain dominance of masculinist imagery and martial aesthetics, the question that arises in the light of the documented human rights abuses and gendered violence is how one could possibly relate a theory of aesthetics and emotions with a conceptualization of grief as precisely that which prevents any straightforward transfer of loss and suffering into a type, classificatory system, or given language. This is not a question that would pertain exclusively to Sikh philosophy, but as scholarly research has highlighted the processes by which norm-giving processes have instrumentalized grief and suffering, often at the expense of those undergoing the experience of grief, [8] there is a particular urgency to rethink the possibilities and capacities of art and aesthetic practices in regard to these emotions.

## Cross-References

- [Dhadi\(s\)](#)
- [Folklore \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Migration, Sikh](#)
- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Punjab](#)
- [Religious Practices](#)

## References

1. Adorno T (1973) *Ästhetische Theorie*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt
2. Bäumer B (2008) The lord of the heart: Abhinavagupta's aesthetics and Kashmir Saivism. *Relig Arts* 12:214–229
3. Bharata-Muni (1970) In: Masson JL, Patwardhan MV (ed and trans) *Aesthetic rapture. The Rasadhya of the Nāṭyaśāstra*. Deccan College, Poona
4. Bhogal B (2001) On the hermeneutics of Sikh thought and Praxis. In: Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (eds) *Sikh religion, culture & ethnicity*. Curzon Press, Richmond/Surrey
5. Brown K (ed) (1999) *Sikh art and literature*. Routledge, London/New York
6. Cheetham D (2010) Exploring the aesthetic 'Space' for inter-religious encounter. *Exchange* 39:71–86
7. Costello D, Willsdon D (eds) (2008) *The life and death of images. Ethics and aesthetics*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca
8. Das V (2007) *Life and words. Violence and the descent into the ordinary*. Berkeley University Press, Berkeley
9. Deol JS (2003) Illustrations and illuminations in Sikh scriptural manuscripts. In: Singh K (ed) *New insights into Sikh art*. Marg Publications, Mumbai
10. Fischer-Lichte E (2004) *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt
11. Gerow E (1997) Indian aesthetics: a philosophical survey. In: Deutsch E, Bontekoe R (eds) *A companion to world philosophies*. Blackwell, Malden
12. Gerow E (1994) Abhinavagupta's aesthetics as speculative paradigm. *J Am Orient Soc* 114(2)
13. Goswamy BN (2000) *Piety and Splendour: Sikh heritage in art*. Delhi National Museum, New Delhi
14. Goswamy BN (2003) The changing face of things: little-known 'Sikh' portraits from Patiala. In: Singh K (ed) *New insights into Sikh art*. Marg Publications, Mumbai
15. Halpern C (2002) *Suffering, politics, power. A genealogy in modern political theory*. State University of New York Press, Albany
16. Higgins KM (2007) An alchemy of emotion: *rasa* and aesthetic breakthroughs. *J Aesthet Art Crit* 65(1):43–54
17. Hirschkind C (2006) *The ethical soundscape. Cassette Sermons and Islamic counterpublics*. Columbia University Press, New York
18. Kalra V (2005) Locating the Sikh Pagh. *Sikh Formations* 1(1):75–92
19. Kant I (1983 [1790]) *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt
20. Katz J (1996) Music and aesthetics: an early Indian perspective. *Early Music* 24(3):467
21. Kaur I (2011) Sikh Sabad Kirtan and Gurmata Sangit: what's in the name? *J Punjab Stud* 18(1&2):251–278
22. Kermani N (1999) *Gott ist schön. Das Ästhetische Erleben des Koran*. Beck Verlag, München

23. Lyotard J-F (1992) *The inhuman*. Stanford University Press, Stanford
24. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the West. Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York
25. Mansukhani G (1982) *Indian classical music and Sikh Kirtan*. Oxford & IBH, New Delhi
26. Masson D (2006) *Rasa, rasaesthetics, and dramatic theory as performance packaging*. *Theatre Res Int* 31(1):69–83
27. McLeod WH (1991) *Popular Sikh art*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
28. Menke C (1998) *The Sovereignty of art. Aesthetic negativity in Adorno and Derrida* (trans: Neil Solomon). MIT Press, Cambridge, MA
29. Mitchell WJT (2006) *What do pictures want? The lives and loves of images*. Chicago University Press, Chicago
30. Myrvold K (2007) *Inside the Guru's gate. Ritual uses of texts among the Sikhs in Varanasi*. Lund University, Lund
31. Nijhawan M (2003) From divine bliss to ardent passion: exploring Sikh religious aesthetics through the Dhadi genre. *Hist Relig* 42(4):59–85
32. Nijhawan M (2006) *Dhadi Darbar. Religion, violence, and the performance of Sikh history*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
33. Patanker RB (1980) Does the *Rasa* theory have any modern relevance? *Philos East West* 30:301–302
34. Qureshi R (2000) How does music mean? Embodied memories and the politics of affect in the Indian Sarangi. *Am Ethnol* 27:805–838
35. Rai G, Singh K (2003) Brick by sacred brick: architectural projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind. In: Singh K (ed) *New insights into Sikh art*. Marg Publications, Mumbai
36. Rancière J (2000) *Malaise dans l'esthétique*. Éditions Galilée, Paris
37. Shackle C, Mandair A (eds) (2005) *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Sikh scriptures*. Routledge, London
38. Singh P (2006) *Sikhism and music*. In: Beck GL (ed) *Sacred sounds*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo
39. Singh NG-K (1993) *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the transcendent*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
40. Rancière J (2004) *The politics of aesthetics. The distribution of the sensible* (trans: Rockhill G). Continuum, London/New York
41. Singh K (2003) *New insights into Sikh art*. Marg Publications, Mumbai
42. Vatsyayan K et al (eds) (2008) *Aesthetic theories and forms in Indian tradition*. Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi
43. Wulff D (1986) Religion in a new mode: the convergence of the aesthetic and the religious in Medieval India. *J Am Acad Relig* LIV 4:673–688

---

## Akali

- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)

---

## Akali Dal

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)

---

## Akali/Akali Dal

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

Akali is an individual who embodies timelessness. The Akali Dal, also known as the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), is a Sikh political party that evolved out of earlier Sikh political organizations such as the Central Sikh League (CSL) and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). Since its inception in 1920, the Akali Dal has been a political force in Punjab and has continually claimed to broadly represent Sikh political sentiments.

## Development of the Term Akali

Akali is derived from the word *akal*, or timelessness. [6, 14] Akal is often translated to take the form of an epithet used for a monotheistic godhead thereby allowing for the creation of glosses such as Timeless Being or Timeless One. [12] However, in scholarly translations of the term Akali the process of translation begins with a problematic presupposition which posits timelessness as an attribute of an absolute godhead.

[2, 3, 8, 15] These scholarly works are mainly interested in a temporalized political movement during colonialism and therefore obfuscate the fuller meaning of the term Akali. As such, most typical translations lean more specifically on terms such as *akalpurakh* and employ a transcendentalized notion of being, or *purakh* to assist in placing Sikhism within the discourse on World Religions. [4, 5] The use of similar significations for both *akalpurakh* and *akal*, especially for purposes of translation, occur through an elaborate systematic and prolonged program of simplifying or reducing meaning in the hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib through acts of translation in order to make Sikhism appear to be generally approachable which concomitantly occurs during the colonial period. [4] *Akal* simply signifies a dissociation from ordinary time or an ascription which can neither be circumscribed within personhood nor through successive-time. Akali, is a moniker for a person who embodies just such a dissociative sense of time. [3, 4, 5] An *Akali* resists modes of transcendentalization. Therefore, it refers to a formation of being which is not circumscribed by mundane notions of time – that is to say, it cannot be temporalized, nor is it beholden to the political or the religious realms. Akali is a conformational essence which moves time and thus remains singular and can freely associate with or adopt to an assortment of apparently intolerable situations.

The term Akali began being applied to exemplary members of the Khalsa sometime during the eighteenth century. The Khalsa was founded by the last human guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh, and it played a pivotal role in developing the teachings of the Sikh Gurus after guruship was vested in the Guru Granth Sahib. The first known application of Akali to a person is, Akali Naina Singh whose disciple Akali Phula Singh gained notice by forming an elite fighting force in the Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army. After the annexation of Punjab the Akali forces were disbanded and as a result the numbers of Akalis quickly dwindled and practically vanished by the beginning of the twentieth century. The Akali were not only ferocious and precise fighter but by practicing the ideal of the warrior-saint (*sant-sipahi*) they acted as exemplars of Sikh ethical ideals of

engagement with society as well as the imperative defense of sovereign notions of the just. [4, 5] Not much more is known about this original group of elite soldiers but their bravery and courage became legendary. [3, 9, 11, 15]

The term Akali would be resurrected politically to haunt the British colonial administration during the second quarter of the twentieth century to powerful and long-lasting effect. The British had established a particularly stringent and frequently violent form of administration in the Punjab due to insecurities around the fragility of their hold on the region. In order to have an impact upon the religious communities of Punjab, such as the Sikhs, the British established a soft form of hegemony within the major Gurdwaras by supporting a subsection of priests known as *mahants*. The mahants maintained the Gurdwaras but through British patronage they had begun to act as though they were owners of the respective Gurdwara(s) to which their reach extended. However, many of the mahants were unpopular because they could misappropriate the public donations given at the Gurdwara in order to adopt lavish lifestyles considered by many pious Sikhs as immoral. Many adopted practices at variance with the mainstream Sikh tradition, including the display of idols alongside the Guru Granth Sahib and within the Harimandar itself. This usurpation of shared sacred space was in contradiction to the teachings of *gurmat* and eventually led to groups, or *jathas*, committing themselves to what they understood as an endeavor to liberate Gurdwaras from mahant control. These groups were organized and functioned largely along military lines, many began to roam the countryside agitating against mahant dominance of Sikh sacred space where it was felt to be necessary. [2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15]

## The Akali Dal: Formation and Activities

The process of politicizing the Sikh polity in Panjab was furthered by events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in April 1919. Since the vast majority of victims were Sikhs, the incident added urgency to calls for creating new organizational bodies to effectively represent the

community's political interests. This incident became a major catalyst for the formation of Sikh political parties. For instance, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which held its inaugural meeting at the Akal Takht on 12 December 1920, was established when large numbers of the lower castes were initiated into the Khalsa on 12 October 1920. This group liberated the Akal Takht and appointed Teja Singh Bucchar as the first *jathedar*, or president the following day. In November, a general meeting was convened where more than 10,000 Sikhs gathered in attendance to deliberate on how to liberate the remaining parts of the precinct. These events gave the British a clear signal that the Sikh masses were not with the mahants, the conservative "Sanatan Sikhs" or the British influence upon their sacred space. During this general meeting, 175 members were elected to form a managing committee for all Sikh Gurdwaras. The formation of the SGPC was an important initial step in the general movement to liberate Sikh gurdwaras in which the Akali Dal would play an integral part. [2, 5, 12, 15]

Several months later, a general meeting of Sikhs was convened at Amritsar on 29 December 1919. This meeting coincided with the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress Party (INC) and the Muslim League. Prominent members of the emerging western educated Sikhs including Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Harchand Singh Lyallpuri, and Master Sundar Singh Lyallpuri were amongst those present who dominated the session which led to the formation of the Central Sikh League (CSL). The first president of the CSL, Sardar Bahadur Gajjan Singh was a political moderate but the impact he had was minimal due to the short-lived tenure of his presidency. During the second session at Lahore in October 1920, the leadership took on a more nationalistic perspective with the election of the second president, Baba Kharak Singh. [2, 11, 15] The aims of this political body were centered upon fostering a sense of community as well as developing a stronger idea of Sikh identity through direct political engagement with the colonial administration as well as the broader Punjabi populous. The formation of the SGPC and the CSL

were motivated by a reformist impulse which was shared by kindred groups such as the largely intellectual Singh Sabha movement. The investiture of reformist ideas within such political organizations reveals how this impulse was radicalized and morphed in its structure through passing into the hands of broader group of Sikhs who were more overtly motivated by Khalsa ideals and principles. The retention of the Khalsa principle enabled their zeal for direct engagement and action in the public space and explains why the name Akali was chosen for what amounted to a corps of individuals organized around military lines. [5]

The creation of both the SGPC and the CSL helped lay the groundwork for the formation of the Akali Dal, or Shiromani Akal Dal (SAD), as a body to help coordinate and organize the loosely formed local *jathas* which had already begun endeavors to free gurdwaras from the mahants and educate rural Sikhs about their inappropriate and deliberate attempts to alter the message of the Sikh Gurus. [1–3] Shortly after the formation of the SGPC, Master Mota Singh was amongst the first to call for the formation of a body to function alongside the SGPC which could coordinate the integration of the local *jathas*. A meeting was held at the Akal Takht on 14 December 1920, two days following the creation of the SGPC, where Sanmukh Singh Jhabal was selected to lead a central corps of individuals who could inculcate a greater degree of coordination amongst the local *jathas*. This meeting is generally considered the first meeting of the SAD which was also referred to as the *Akali Fauj*, or the Akali Army, in official government correspondences. [2, 3, 12] The objectives of the newly formed party were communicated through its newspaper, *The Akali*. [2, 8, 15] They included the need to bring Sikh educational facilities such as Khalsa College under control of the Sikh community, a call for Sikhs to participate in India's independence movement, and most importantly, the call to liberate Sikh shrines from the control of mahants. [5, 8]

Despite its military formation and ethos, the Akali Dal was at the forefront of an era of non-violent agitation by Sikhs against British rule which stretched from the 1920s through to the 1940s. During its formative years, the Akali Dal's

nonviolent agitations and other political activities were enabled largely through the support of other political entities such as the CSL and the SGPC as well as the periodic support of larger pan-Indian parties such as the INC. The SAD initially functioned to garner volunteers and coordinate movements of the largely independent jathas which continued to operate locally through their own initiatives such as encouraging Sikhs to take initiation into the Khalsa. However, several important attempts to liberate central gurdwaras, including the Guru Ka Bagh, Jaito, and Bhai Pheru movements, led to the increased prominence of the SGPC amongst groups functioning in Punjab. These movements also led to the complete integration of the local jathas which made the SAD a more centralized unit. [2, 5, 9, 15]

### **The Akali Dal and the 1925 Gurdwaras Act**

The increased influence of both the SGPC and SAD during their initial years led to both parties being declared unlawful by 12 October 1923. However, the success of the nonviolent protests instigated under both SGPC and SAD culminated in the repealing of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act of 1922 and its replacement with the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 by then Punjab Governor, Malcolm Hailey, who effectively conceded to Akali demands by signing a bill in the legislative courts. This reformulated bill formally recognized the SGPC as the legal authority to manage and control Sikh Gurdwaras. In doing so the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 transformed the nature and dynamic relation between both parties. The SGPC was formally identified as a religious body comprised of regularly elected representatives for the governance of Sikh religious affairs. While this distinction was seemingly benign, it enabled British ideas of religion and the distinct separation of the religious and political sphere to pervade Sikh discourse through the judiciary. It also curtailed any future role the SAD could have in national questions such as the formation of

Pakistan by limiting their scope to the exclusive representation of Sikh interests while altering the universalism debate espoused by the Khalsa to but one historical formation of Sikhism. [1, 2, 5, 15]

The Gurdwaras Act created a conceptual instability within the Khalsa political project through a delimitation of its relevance within the public sphere. Up until the demise of Ranjit Singh's Kingdom of Lahore, the idea of *panth* acted to enable broader claims made by Sikhs, through the Khalsa, to represent a much larger swath of society. Up until 1925, the notion of *panth* had been central for the Khalsa's political development as well its intellectual discourse. The idea of a panth was not constrained culturally, ethnically, or politically as it did not operate through an intellectual project of distancing one group from another but was highly skeptical and critical of such endeavors. Thus, the Khalsa was deeply resistant to any strict separation of religion and politics. However, the British administration understood panth as acceding to the ideology of secularism and saw the Sikhs as a modern religious community. A kind of shunt was therefore instituted through the Gurdwaras Act as the notion of panth would be superseded by the Persian term *qaum* which bore greater emphasis on Sikhs as a distinct politicospiritual community, or a nation in their own right alongside nations that comprised the Indian subcontinent. Quam eventually gained greater currency amongst Sikh intellectuals as well as within Sikh congregations. Through it, the religious or communal politics of the Akalis, and by proxy the SGPC, came to subscribe to a form of nationalism predicated upon the idea that the Indian nation was always already made up of distinct sovereign cultural communities that were not necessarily mutually exclusive. While the move to communitarian nationalism was possible with a manageable amount of discursive tension, the Akalis were effectively barred from enacting a switch to secular nationalism upon Western lines of thought because the Gurdwara Act of 1925 delimited them, through their association with the SGPC, as a religious political party. Therefore, the Akalis



could never hope to make claims to represent a universal community composed beyond the bounds of the Sikh religion. [1, 5]

This can be seen through the rift which occurred in 1930 that split the Akali Dal between Baba Kharak Singh, a revert nationalist who went on to form the Central Akali Dal (CAD), and Master Tara Singh who continued to lead the SAD. The politics leading up to the division of the British Raj into Pakistan and India revealed how the changes instituted by the Gurdwaras Act made the SAD ineffectual act negotiating a vision of the new nation which would not be detrimental to the Sikhs. Master Tara Singh's proposal of a large territory stretching from Delhi to the River Chenab, wherein the Sikhs, Muslims or Hindus would not be able to hold a majority in government, was rejected as it did not consider the interests of these three groups separately. By 1968, the rift between the CAD and SAD was sutured as the perspective of the SAD prevailed. However, their inability to adopt a secular stance, in contradistinction with the INC for instance, would continue to shape the politics of Punjab after partition in 1947. General demands for greater autonomy by the Akalis were couched rhetorically by INC as religiously motivated Sikh demands for increased sovereignty throughout the 1970s through the mid-1990s. While the Akalis, and other Sikh leaders of the time believed themselves to represent the common interests of the people in Punjab they were completely ineffectual at stemming the tide of the national propaganda machine. Thus, the state was emboldened to violently suppress Sikhs, its own citizens, in order to protect the broader national secular mythology surrounding unity. [5, 10, 13]

## Cross-References

- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)

## References

1. Ahluwalia ML (1985) Gurdwara reform movement, 1919–1925, an era of Congress-Akali collaboration: select documents. Ashoka International Publishers, New Delhi
2. Grewal JS (1996) The Akalis: a short history. Punjab Studies Publications, Chandigarh
3. Gulati KC (1974) Akalis: past and present. Ashajanak Publications, Delhi
4. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
5. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
6. Nabha BKS (2003) Akal. In: Mahankosh. National Bookshop, Delhi
7. Peace ML (1968) S Kartar Singh Jhabbar, the spearhead of the Akali movement. Peace and Rattan Kaur, Jullundur
8. Singh G (ed) (1965) Some confidential papers of the Akali movement. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee, Sikh Itihas Research Board, Amritsar
9. Singh M (1978) The Akali movement. The Macmillan Company of India, Delhi
10. Singh G (1981) Failure of Akali leadership. Usha Institute of Religious Studies, Sirsa, Haryana
11. Singh M (1988) The Akali struggle: a retrospect. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi
12. Singh D (1993) Akali politics in Punjab (1964–1985). National Book Organization, New Delhi
13. Singh R (1997) Akali Movement, 1926–1947. Omsons Publications, New Delhi
14. Singh H (1998) Akal. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
15. Singh H (1998) Akali Dal, Shiromani. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala

## Akhand Path

Randeep Hothi  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

Unbroken reading

## Main Text

Akhand Path is a continual reading of the entire Guru Granth Sahib. The Akhand Path is conducted at various occasions including marriage, funeral, days commemorating the Gurus, and important life stages such as the beginning of studies or business. The practice originated approximately 300 years ago.

The Akhand Path most often takes place in a formal Gurdwara setting. Alternatively, the Akhand Path may take place at a home. For some Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib is housed permanently in the home. In this case, the home is considered a Gurdwara. For these Sikhs, more often than an Akhand Path will be the performance of a *Sahaj Path*. The Sahaj Path reading is not continuous and may span over the course of more than a week. Alternatively, an Akhand Path may be performed by bringing the scripture from a local Gurdwara. [1] More rare still is the *Ati Akhand Path*, in which the Akhand Path is conducted by a single person. [2]

The reading takes about 48 h to complete by several readers who recite in relay without break or pause. Readers aim to seamlessly pick up from where previous readers leave so as to recite the Akhand Path without break, with emphasis to accurate and clear pronunciation. [1] During the reading, the *karah prasad* is distributed to listeners when possible. [1]

At the outset of the Akhand Path ceremony, *karah prasad*, a recipe consisting of flour, sugar, and butter, is prepared and six stanzas of the Anand Sahib are read. [2] Then, a prayer-hymn known as Ardas is collectively recited during which guidance in reading is requested. [1] After this, the Guru Granth Sahib is sought for *hukam* (lit: command, injunction). This is the procedure by which Sikhs receive a portion of the text for instruction. Only then does the reading begin with the reading of the Japji Sahib.

The conclusion is known as *bhog* (from Sanskrit, lit: enjoyment, pleasure), in which the mood tends to be that of jubilation and anticipation. [3] The congregation attending the Akhand Path is at its largest at the time the *sloks* of Guru Teg Bahadur, which begin on page 1426 of the Guru

Granth Sahib, begin being recited. After the entire Guru Granth Sahib is read, then five verses of the Japji Sahib and six verses of the Anand Sahib are respectively read and sung. After this, *Ardas* will be performed and once again *karah prasad* distributed. [1] After this, congregations receive *langar*.

## Cross-References

- [Anand Sahib](#)
- [Gurbani Kirtan](#)
- [Japji](#)

## References

1. Cole O, Sambhi PS (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon Press, London
2. McLeod WH (1995) Historical dictionary of Sikhism. Scarecrow Press, London
3. Nesbitt E (2005) Sikhism a very short introduction. Oxford University Press, New York

---

## Alue

- [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Amar Das (Guru)

I. J. Singh  
New York University, New York, NY, USA

## Definition

Third Sikh Guru, Amar Das was given title on March 29, 1552.

## The Third Sikh Guru

The third Sikh Guru, Amar Das, born a Hindu in 1479 in Basarke, a village near Amritsar in Punjab, had been a fervent *Vaisnava* all his life.

He had undertaken, and led, yearly pilgrimages to Haridwar – history speaks of at least 20 yearly treks made by him – that have great importance to devout Hindus. [5, 8]

Two incidents are said to be responsible for his transformation to a Sikh. First a Hindu holy man chided him for not having a living spiritual master. The other, more important, was a chance meeting: Guru Angad had succeeded Nanak as the second Sikh Guru. His daughter, Bibi Amro, was married to a nephew of Amar Das. In 1540, Amar Das heard her singing a hymn of Guru Nanak. When he asked her about it, she escorted Amar Das to a conclave of Sikhs and the presence of Guru Angad, her father. Amar Das was so enthralled that he stayed 12 years in service of Guru Angad and never again went on any Hindu pilgrimage. [1, 3]

Amar Das was 61 years old when he changed the direction of his life and entered the path of Sikhism. [4]

He spent much of his time in meditation and service in the community kitchen (*langar*) in which he volunteered for the chores of cooking and cleaning, serving meals, and collecting firewood. He would also rise 3 h before dawn to fetch water from the nearby river *Beas*. Tradition records that one dark and stormy night, returning with pails of water, he tripped and stumbled. A woman in a nearby house, awakened by the noise, dismissed him with the comment “Oh it’s that homeless Amru again.” When Guru Angad heard of it, he honored Amar Das as the “Home of the homeless, strength of the weak and the honor of the destitute. . .”. [1, 3, 6] Almost 500 years later, Amar Das continues to be defined by the words that Guru Angad bestowed upon him.

Perhaps this incident played a part, but when the time came for Guru Angad to anoint a successor as the third Guru, Amar Das was a natural choice because of unfailing service to the House of Nanak. The two sons of Guru Angad were not at all pleased to be spurned by their father as claimants to the honor. The 73-year-old Amar Das became Guru Amar Das on March 29, 1552 and served in that position until September 1, 1574. [1, 3, 4, 6]

From his headquarters in Goindval in Punjab, Guru Amar Das dramatically expanded the reach

of Sikh presence across the country and set up an organizational structure along some very modern principles of management. His period was also notable for dramatic steps to improve the place of women.

An egalitarian society, social enlightenment, and the position of women in a progressive society were the overarching concerns of Guru Amar Das. Building, consolidation, and reform of the Sikh community are his legacy. [7, 9]

*Guru Ka Langar*, the community kitchen that Guru Nanak founded, became increasingly important because of Guru Amar Das. He insisted that every visitor first joins the *pangat* at *langar* and breaks bread with others before the Guru would see him or her. [3, 4] This not only fed the visitors who had often come from afar but, more importantly, also destroyed the rigid caste distinctions that defined people of India then.

It is important to note that these matters were so pervasive in society at that time that people from high and low castes would not sit together and never break bread together. A high-caste person would not accept food from the hands of one from a low caste and never sit with him to share food or conversation on community matters.

Tradition states that Akbar, the emperor of India, an enlightened ruler, and a contemporary of Guru Amar Das, respected the Sikh tradition of a casteless *langar*. Once he came to visit the Guru and partook of *langar* with the ordinary Sikhs before the Guru would meet with him. [1, 3, 6]

Guru Amar Das actively discouraged the custom of *sati*, prevalent at that time, in which a Hindu woman would immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. He also rejected the system of dowry to be provided by the bride’s family at marriage. In the widely practiced mores of the day, a widow would not remarry; Guru Amar Das condemned this practice and encouraged the remarriage of widows. He also discouraged the prevailing custom that required women to veil themselves in public. [2, 4]

Both Gurus that preceded Guru Amar Das, particularly Guru Nanak, had traveled widely across the country. In a far-reaching step, extremely advanced for the times, Guru Amar Das organized the ecclesiastical structure to



carry the message of Nanak across the land into 22 diocesan areas and appointed a manager for each; eight of these territorial heads were women. [2, 4]

History is clear that Guru Nanak developed the first Sikh community in Kartarpur and personally guided it for more than the last decade of his life, while Guru Angad moved to Khadur Sahib to nurture a second Sikh community. Similarly, Guru Amar Das selected Goindval as his headquarter. [4] Tradition suggests that Angad and Amar Das moved away from Kartarpur to develop new townships because of internecine conflict between the previous Guru's progeny that had been bypassed in succession and his incoming successor. [1, 3, 6] Even though true to an extent, this is too simplistic a rendering to be entirely satisfactory.

History states that by the time a new Guru was anointed, the town founded by the previous Guru had already developed into a thriving center of business, commerce, and manufacturing. [2, 4] The new Guru's physically moving to a new town did not dramatically diminish the luster of the old center. Note that every Guru, with the exception of Harkrishan who was very young and served as Guru for a very brief time, founded one or more new townships. Surely, establishing new townships by the Gurus was a conscious and serious attempt to develop the economic infrastructure and social fabric of Punjab.

Guru Amar Das asked that Sikhs assemble twice a year – at *Diwali* and *Baisakhi* – at Goindval to meet with the Guru and reconnect with the teachings. He also had a *baoli* (a deep well) with 84 steps constructed to assure adequate water supply for the residents and the large number of visitors. [1, 3] However, as would not be surprising in the traditional Indian culture, the site and the baoli have, with time, morphed into impressive centers of pilgrimage despite the clear teachings and doctrine of Guru Granth to the contrary.

Like Guru Nanak and Guru Angad before him, Guru Amar Das composed hymns that form a significant part of the corpus of Guru Granth. His compositions are in 17 of the 31 different musical measures or raagas represented in the Guru Granth; only Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, contributed a larger number. Guru Amar Das collected the writings of his

predecessor Gurus and of selected saints and writers of that time in two volumes. [3, 4]

Many miracles are attributed to Guru Amar Das, but it is good to remember that he rejected all miracles, as did all other nine Gurus in Sikhism. [2, 4] His teachings were as simple as his way of life.

Three citations from his writings are offered as examples of his state of mind and his thinking; the English translations are modified from Trilochan Singh et al. [10]:

*"Eh sareera mereya iss jug mei aye kay kya tudh karam kamaya,"* Guru Granth p. 972,

In a challenging call these words ask what footprints will you leave in the sands of time;

*"Man tu jote saroop hai apnaa mool pehchhan,"* Guru Granth, p. 441,

Oh my mind you are the spark of the divine, know thyself; and the lines read at every Sikh wedding

*"Dhan phir eh na akhiyan behan akithhay hoye; ek jote doey moorti dhan phir kahiyae soye,"* Guru Granth p. 788,

They are not truly husband and wife whose two bodies come together; only they are truly wed when two bodies have one soul.

On September 1, 1574 Guru Amar Das anointed his son-in-law Jetha as Ram Das, the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, in preference to his own two sons. [2, 3]

## Cross-References

- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Ramdas \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Bhalla SD (1971) Mahima Parkash. Punjabi University, Patiala
2. Fauja S, Jaggi RS (1982) Perspectives on Guru Amar Das. Punjabi University, Patiala
3. Gyan Singh G (1970) Prachin Panth Parkash. Punjabi University, Patiala
4. Jodh S (1949) Life of Guru Amar Das. Amritsar
5. Kahn Singh N (1974) Mahaan Kosh. Languages Department Punjab, Patiala
6. Macauliffe MA (1909) The Sikh religion. Oxford

7. Neki JS (2000) The spiritual heritage of the Punjab. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
8. Padam Singh P (1996) Guru Amar Das. In: Harbans S (ed) The encyclopaedia of Sikhism, vol I. 87–89 pp
9. Singh IJ (2003) The art of nation building in being & becoming a Sikh. The Centennial Foundation, Toronto
10. Trilochan S, Jodh S, Kapur S, Bawa HS, Khushwant S (1966) The sacred writings of the Sikhs. UNESCO

## Amritdhari

Randeep Hothi  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Khalsa](#)

## Definition

A Sikh initiated into the Khalsa.

## Main Text

Amritdhari consists of two words: amrit and dhari. *Amrit* refers to being without death, or a nectar substance that imbues deathlessness. The term amrit is found throughout the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. For example, the following excerpt is composed by Guru Ram Das and is found on Ang 982 set under the musical notation of Raag Nat:

The word: Guru. Guru is the word. Within the word is all Amrit.

Within *Gurbani*, *amrit* is not confined to a physical, existent nectar inasmuch as the more open-ended drive for and in devotion. *Dhari* signifies bestowment, such that *amritdhari* literally means he/she for whom being beyond dying has been bestowed. The two terms are found in conjunction on Ang 404 in a composition by Guru Arjan Sahib in Raag Aasa:

My beloved bestowed amrit. The Guru hadn't withheld it for even a moment.

Here, *amrit* is highlighted as the ecstatic manifestation arising from a relationship with the Guru.

The term *amritdhari* is almost always used to signify the Khalsa, an order initiated by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Khalsa initiation involves initiates supping the sugar laden water prepared by five Khalsa/*amritdhari* Sikhs which is itself known to be amrit. The term *amritdhari* is synonymous with the term Khalsa.

The term refers to those who have been “baptized” by taking the *amrit* ceremony and thus have become part of the Khalsa. The term can be used as both an adjective and noun. It refers coextensively with the term Khalsa.

## Cross-References

► [Khalsa](#)

## References

1. McLeod WH (1995) Historical dictionary of Sikhism. Scarecrow Press, London
2. Cole O, Sambhi PS (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon Press, London
3. Nesbitt E (2005) Sikhism a very short introduction. Oxford University Press, New York

## Amritsar

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

Amritsar, or *amrit sar*, literally means pool of liberating nectar or a place from where liberation occurs. Amritsar is a city in the province of Punjab

in Northwestern India. Today, it is one of the largest cities in the province functioning as a business, cultural, and spiritual center. Since the point of its founding, Amritsar has been an important historical, spiritual, and cultural center for Sikhs.

## The City of Nectar and the Sikh Gurus

Amritsar, as it is known today, is the name of a town established by the fourth Sikh Guru, Ram Das (1534–1581). In 1564, Ram Das initiated the digging of a water tank with the approval of the third Sikh Guru, Amar Das (1479–1574). This tank was built in the proximity of three preexisting villages Tung, Gumtala, and Sultanvind. Sources differ in regards to how the land was acquired stating either that the land was purchased from the residents of Tung or that the land was given as a gift to Bibi Bhani, the daughter of Guru Amar Das and wife to Ram Das. [6, 8] Upon succeeding the fourth Guru in 1574, Guru Ram Das faced hostility from the sons of Amar Das, Mohan, and Mohri. As a result of the increasing opposition, he shifted his residence to the place where the pool was being constructed. The inevitability of this relocation may have been foreseen by Guru Amar Das himself; Sikh sources state Guru Ram Das was given sanction to relocate from his predecessor. The area where the Guru relocated alternately became known as Ramdaspur, Chakk Ramdas, or Chakk Guru. [1, 3–7]

In 1574, houses were built in the area for Guru Ram Das, his extended family, as well as the community of Sikhs which chose to move alongside their Guru. This initial cluster of homes is referred to as *Guru ka Mehal* or abode of the Guru. [2, 5] It was located only a short distance from where the water tank was being built; a Gurdwara stands upon the site today. The availability of water was secured as was the presence of spiritual leadership through Guru Ram Das, these factors provided the impetus for the establishment and development of a larger town. In this manner, the city grew through an established pattern of evolving urban development during the Mughal period. Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, and Guru

Hargobind, the sixth Guru, continued to develop the town while inviting and encouraged merchants, traders, artisans, and craftsmen to relocate to this new town. Located within the proximity of Lahore, the administrative, cultural, and mercantile capital of the region, Ramdaspur was attractive as it connected to networks of trade which moved from beyond the Gangetic plains in a Northwesterly direction toward Kabul. [1, 7, 9] Concomitant with economic benefits, the residents simultaneously basked in the spiritual beneficence of the Sikh Gurus – which was understood as a real and tangible manifestation arising through their person.

Guru Arjan continued to be active in developing the town which his father Guru Ram Das had founded. Between the years 1581 and 1604, Guru Arjan was busy completing a project to fortify the tank his father began building, which had become known as Amritsar. During these years, he simultaneously worked to build two more tanks of water, known as *Santokhsar*, completed in 1588 and *Ramsar*, completed in 1603. He had also initiated the construction of a building which would be located in the center of the pool, Amritsar. This building would be known alternately as *Harmandar Sahib* and *Darbar Sahib*. Lastly, Guru Arjan began compiling the *Adi Guru Granth Sahib* on the banks of the *Ramsar* tank with his amanuensis, Bhai Gurdas. These major projects required the young Guru to raise new funds. For this purpose, the Sikhs were requested to donate a tenth of their income (*dasvandh*) and the masands were instructed to meet at the beginning of each Baisakhi festival, and to bring with them a contingent of Sikhs plus a remittance of the yearly accounts. [4, 5, 7, 9]

One popular account about the construction of Harmandar Sahib relates that as a gesture of humility and ecumenism, Guru Arjan invited the Sufi saint Mian Mir, with whom he had developed good relations during his stay in Lahore, to lay the foundation stone of the Harmandar. By doing so, the Guru made it clear that the Harmandar belonged to all, irrespective of caste or creed. [5, 6, 8] The sentiments of pluralism and self-effacement were reflected in the architectural design of the Harmandar. The Guru had the

temple built on a lower level than the surrounding city so that visitors would have to physically descend before entering the precincts, suggesting a requirement to efface one's ego, arrogance, and hatred of others in order to achieve a meeting with the Guru. Similarly, the Harmandir had four doors open on all four sides indicating an opening to all cultures, but with only one access to the inner sanctum via a causeway, suggesting that the end goal for all was the same. In 1604, the construction around the Amritsar tank was completed with the ceremonial installation of the Adi Granth inside the Harmandir Sahib building. However, it was not until the early nineteenth century when Maharaja Ranjit Singh had control over the city of Amritsar that Harmandir Sahib was covered with marble and then adorned with gold leaf. [1, 4, 6, 10]

The combination of the liberating tank of water, the building housing the Adi Granth, and the establishment of the singing of *kirtan* within the precincts quickly established the Amritsar tank as a central feature of Ramdaspur. By this time, the neighborhood adjoining Harmandir Sahib also came to be called Amritsar and over the course of time the entire town came to be known this way. [3, 6] The successful completion of this project was a true milestone for Guru Arjan and the Sikh community. It provided a central place for the rapidly expanding Sikh *sangat*. The Guru was now at the center of a major organization and came to be regarded by his followers not only as a spiritual mentor but as a sovereign leader in his own right, a true king (*sacha padshah*). Harmandir Sahib became a rallying point for the community as well as a center of Sikh activity.

Guru Hargobind (1595–1644) succeeded Guru Arjan and continued the legacy of construction in the precincts of the central tank of Amritsar. He built the Akal Takht, or Immortal Throne, from which he sat to address the concerns of the Sikh laity as well as host sporting events such as *kabaddi* which tested the might of young Sikh men. Two more tanks were built in the town by the sixth guru, Kaulsar and Bibeksar which were complete by 1628. Lastly, Guru Hargobind built a fortress on the western limits of the town known as Lohgarh, or steel fortress, from which the town could be defended. A conflict with the Mughal

authorities would force the Guru to depart from the rapidly growing city and reestablish a community in the Sivalak Hills at a town known as Kiratpur, which his son Gurditta had been developing for the Guru. From this point onwards, none of the remaining Sikh Gurus would reside at Amritsar. Rather control of the town, its tanks and Harmandir Sahib would fall in the hands of Guru Hargobind's cousin, Miharban, who developed a schismatic sect under known as the *Minas*. It was not until the death of the last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, that Bhai Mani Singh, and a small band of Khalsa initiates would wrest control of Harmandir Sahib from the *Minas*. After the reclamation of the Harmandir from the *Minas*, the fortification of the city continued through the construction of more forts to defend the city and the installation of large gates as well as towers or *bungas*, which may have served the purposes of education as well as military defense. Such measures were seen as necessary in order to protect the fledgling *panth* from hostile elements. [4, 6, 7, 9]

## Later Developments in Amritsar

The residents of the city came under attack several times up to the present day. After the Banda Bahadur rebellion, the inhabitants of the city witnessed strong repression as members of the Khalsa were hunted down and more generally, Sikhs were persecuted by the Mughal governors of the province. In this period, Amritsar emerged as a rallying centre for the *Tat Khalsa* especially during the *Baisakhi* and *Diwali* festivals. Although they suffered some major losses, particularly to the invading armies of Afghan invaders such as Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali, they were able to survive and actually grow in numbers towards the middle of the eighteenth century. During the colonial period, control over the city once again became an issue and it was felt that the British were trying to influence the Sikhs through patronage of an exegetical group amongst Sikhs known as *Udasis* – which are associated with Guru Nanak's elder son, Sri Chand. It was Maharaja Ranjit Singh who had originally given preferential patronage to the Udasi, thereby giving

them a greater degree of control over the Harmandar and the continuation of this by the British became a divisive issue. Residents of Amritsar were especially political and vocal against the colonizing forces. As such the residents were often meted out cruel punishments like being made to slither along the ground like serpents or being disallowed from certain areas of the city upon threat of violence. Amritsar became a nucleus of political activity amongst groups demanding an end to British rule in Punjab. [1, 3, 4, 8]

Religious reform movements such as the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha were also active during the colonial period in Amritsar. It was during the colonial period that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre occurred in Amritsar in 1919. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre became a focal point for nationalist politicians such as members of the Indian National Congress and as such Amritsar became a location from which not only the Sikhs but much of Punjab were catapulted into a movement which would partition the province, ultimately devastating the province and its established religious and sociocultural mechanisms. Through the signing of the Gurdwara Act of 1925, control of all historic Gurdwaras came under the *Shiromani Gurwara Prabandhak Committee* (SGPC). This electoral body has established its headquarters in the precincts surrounding the Harmandar and they remain the central body for managing Gurdwaras in Punjab. In the 1980s, Amritsar was once again under siege as members of the Sikh *panth* found themselves in an altercation with the Indian nation-state over the constitutional issues of resource allocation and minority rights. [4]

Amritsar has also served as a city from which significant Sikh rituals have developed. One such development occurred through the installation ceremonies associated with the completion of Harmandar Sahib. After the ceremonies were completed, the Granth was wrapped in silk cloths and carried reverentially by Bhai Buddha with Guru Arjan in attendance, to a special chamber where it was placed for the night. As a mark of reverence the Guru slept near the Granth. Early

next morning, the Granth was carried back to the Harmandar and installed once more for the morning service. Thus, a regular pattern was established with the Adi Guru Granth at the center of Sikh practice, a pattern that is followed meticulously to this day. The singing of *akhand kirtan*, or the uninterrupted singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib is also a central feature of Harmandar Sahib and in many ways definitive of the city itself as the verse are thought to be efficacious for the entire population. There were also elaborate celebrations established during important calendric cycles such as a *mela* or festival for harvest during Vaisakhi and also one to celebrate *Deepmala* or *Diwali*. After the development of the Khalsa, the *Vaisakhi Mela* took another aspect when this festival came to simultaneously be the auspices for what came to be known as *sarbat khalsa*, or a common meeting of the Khalsa initiates. During these meetings a process of decision making was established wherein the sovereign singularity of each Khalsa initiate could be engaged in order to make decisions affecting the entire panth. These decisions were referred to as *gurumattas* or decision of the guru. *Gurumattas* were considered to be binding upon those Sikhs who are initiated into the Khalsa but are also meant to bear upon the broader Sikh panth. Thus, Amritsar acted as a hub for the Sikh community and control of it was essential for maintaining and developing the path established by the Sikh gurus in a collective and majoritarian manner. [1, 4, 6, 8, 9]

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Banda Bahadur](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Guru](#)
- [Guru Amar Das](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Kirtan](#)

## References

1. Bawa JS (1977) The heritage of Amritsar. Faqir Singh, Amritsar
2. Datta VN (1967) Amritsar: past & present. Municipal Committee, Amritsar
3. Johar SS (1977) The heritage of Amritsar. Sandeep Prakashan, Delhi
4. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed. London: Bloomsbury
5. Nabha BKS (2003) Akal. In: Mahankosh. National Bookshop, Delhi
6. Singh F (ed) (1977) The city of Amritsar: an introduction. Punjabi University, Patiala
7. Singh F (ed) (1978) The city of Amritsar: a study of historical, cultural, social and economic aspects. Oriental Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi
8. Singh GG (1977) Twarikh Sri Amritsar [reprint]. Amritsar
9. Singh H (1998) Amritsar. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
10. Walia VS (2012) Amritsar: a city with glorious legacy. Singh Brothers, Amritsar

## Devotional Function

This hymn is central to Sikh liturgy and ceremonies. Its first five and final stanzas together form a popular segment that is melodiously recited during every Sikh rite of passage – child naming, amrit initiation, marriage, and death. Any complete reading of the Guru Granth Sahib commences and concludes with the congregation joining in their singing, which is followed by the distribution of *karah parshad*, the warm dish prepared with butter, flour, water, and sugar. The hymn joins Sikh men and women together in their daily worship and helps them share their joy and grief during particular occasions. These six stanzas are also incorporated into the daily Sikh evening prayer (*Rahiras*), enabling each Sikh to refine their inner dynamics. Both individually and collectively, the *Anand Sahib* plays a crucial function in Sikh life.

## Anand Sahib

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh  
Department of Religious Studies, Colby College,  
Waterville, ME, USA

## Synonyms

Guru Amar Das; Guru Granth Sahib; Poetry;  
Rituals

## Definition

Hymn from Sikh scripture.

## Introduction

*Anand Sahib* is a hymn composed by the third Sikh Guru, Amar Das (1479–1574). “Anand” means bliss, and “sahib” denotes its revered status. It has 40 stanzas. They constitute pp. 917–22 of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS).

## Textual Context

Guru Amar Das had great reverence for sacred poetry. He was prolific as 907 of his hymns are recorded in the GGS. He also collected the compositions of his predecessor Gurus and non-Sikh saints from different social classes. He made important contributions to the codification of the Sikh canon: the Goindval manuscripts inscribed by his grandson Sahansram were compiled under his supervision.

The Anand hymn originally had 38 stanzas as recorded in the Goindval volumes. The structural pattern of 38 stanzas parallels Guru Nanak’s Japji, the opening hymn in Sikh scripture. Just as the epilogue to the Japji was a later addition of Guru Nanak’s successor, the final stanza of the Anand is also a later addition of the fourth Guru, Ram Das. While creating the canon, Guru Arjan (Nanak 5) added stanza 34 in his own voice. It is placed in between those passages where the Guru is in dialogue with his physical self. These additions by the Fourth and Fifth Guru are appropriately set to reinforce the intrinsic message of Guru Amar Das’ composition. The *Anand Sahib* is valuable in



disclosing some of the textual processes involved in the expansion and evolution of the GGS.

The composition is set to the *Raga Ramkali*, eighteenth of the 31 musical measures used in the GGS. *Ramkali* is a morning raga, performed after sunrise to evoke the mood of exaltation. The musicological context is fully in harmony with the metaphysical text. Intriguingly, the song of bliss is immediately juxtaposed to an elegy by Sundar (a great grandson of Guru Amar Das) – recalling the advice given by the Guru during his last moments that nobody was to weep or lament, nor to perform the customary mourning rites. The very sequence of the hymns points to the coexistence of joy and sorrow and inspires their acceptance.

## Textual Content

Anand Sahib underscores fundamental aspects of Sikh theology, ethics, and aesthetics. Many of the concepts and expressions coming from the founder Guru are reproduced by Guru Amar Das in his distinctive artistic and spiritual tenor:

1. **Theologically**, the entire Anand text replays the ever-dynamic dialectic between an impersonal infinite Being and a palpable experience of that One. The Divine is rendered in abstract terms: One (*hari ikku hai*, #36), inaccessible and unfathomable (*agam agocara*, #12), infinite (*ant na paia*, #12), true (*sacha*, #13), and priceless (*amulaku*, #30). But the Guru brings the intangible Being into language, so it is actively engaged with in the lived context. This infinite devoid of any contours is addressed directly as the creator (*karta* #26): “you produced every life and creature” (*ji janat sabh tudha upae*, #13). The creator of generous and beneficent nature (*data* #) is a wonderful caretaker who “sustains us in the mother’s womb” (*mata ke udar mehi pratipal kare*, #28). Evidently the Divine is not a static immutable eternity outside the fluctuations of time: “Everything in this vast cosmos we see is a manifestation of the Divine – *eh visu sansaru tum dekhde ehu hari ka rupu hai*” (#36). There

is no disruption between the one Divine and countless beings. Perceptive of his religiously pluralistic context, Guru Amar Das’s expansive imaginary recognizes the One as the creator of Shiva and Shakti as well (#26). No god, no body, and no thing is excluded from the all-pervasive creator. Beyond gender, “the Divine is itself mother, itself father” (*hari ape mata ape pita* #33). Rather than an exclusive monotheistic patriarchal God, the Guru reaches out to the impersonal Being transcending every binary and every category in personal relations and is ecstatic to experience It in his own self.

2. **Ethically**, the goal is to live ever in tune with the Divine. The Guru therefore distinguishes between the authentic and inauthentic modes of existence. “Those duped by doubt drift in ten directions; those anchored to the Name are adorned – *ikki bharami bhule firhi dah disi ikki nami lagi savaria*” (#8). Individuals who turn away from their universal root, Guru Amar Das calls them *vemukh* (face/*mukh*+away/*ve*, #22). Centering on the “I,” “me,” and “mine,” they are reduced to a narrow self-centered personality. Such people assert themselves in opposition to others, through competition, malice, ill will, and a craving for power.

But by giving up the selfish ego (*aapi taji*, #14), they desire the Divine (*hari vasna samani* #14). Called *sanmukhs* (facing/*mukh* +with/*san*, #21) or *gurmukhs* (facing towards the Guru, #26), they live with the ever present Being in their consciousness. They wear the eyeliner of knowledge, *gian anjanu* (#6). The Guru utilizes the trope of the eyes to emphasize the universal process of recognition. Moral responsibilities are not different based on class, profession, age, or gender as in the traditional Indic worldview. Everybody, urges the Guru, should be actively involved in the daily domestic, social, and political affairs while keeping the One ever in sight. Unlike those who practice external austerities and ablutions, the moral people remember the Divine and are authentically pure. “They live with pure mothers, fathers, families, and pure are all their associates – *pavit mata pita kutamb sahit siu*

*pavitu sangati sabaia*” (#17). They enjoy infinite rapture that Guru Amar Das describes vividly throughout his hymn. Clearly, his theological worldview is linked with the existential: the Divine is an inner, subjective experience of infinity here on earth with family, friends, and associates, rather than a doctrinal belief in “God” unattached to space and time.

The ethical reflections in the Anand text reveal this temporal world as a part of the Divine. The cosmos is good. Birth is good. In fact, it is a precious gem (*janam rattan*, #20). The sacred and secular dimensions are not split apart. There is no Cartesian dualism between mind and body, for the Divine is present in everybody, starting out with the origins in the mother’s womb. Divine cognition fills individuals with confidence and inspires them to develop healthy physiques and constructive relationships with nature and society around. Birth becomes the utmost possibility of orienting humans in this physical world so that they experience fully – body and mind – the Absolute within the natural and social fibers of their selves.

3. **Aesthetically**, the Anand Sahib puts the spiritual process in motion. The hymn begins with Guru Amar Das describing his ecstasy. His “mind-and-heart ring with felicitations – *manu vajia vadhaian!*” This joyous space sparkles and glitters with the precious jewels of wisdom that flash out in Guru Nanak’s Japji (“*mati vicu ratan jawahar manik* – wisdom comprises jewels, gems, and pearls,” Japji, 6). The Guru attains his enlightenment “very easily” (*sahaj seti*) without having to go through any rigorous techniques or disciplines. As the opening Anand stanza proceeds, “jewel-like melodies with their families and fairies (*parian*) from afar have come to sing the Word within me.” Fairies who belong to the world of the unconscious add to the horizon of his transcendent imaginary. Here is excitement and joy, and there are no defense mechanisms on his part. The Guru is free; he is ecstatic. He hears beautiful music, and his body is sonorous with the five instruments playing the Word.

Guru Amar Das shares his experience in order to motivate others. Indeed, the Anand hymn is intended to reach out and transform his community. The Guru invites his contemporaries: “come beloved saints let us talk about the ineffable One – *avaho sant pirario akath ki karo kahani*” (#9). The poetic expression is the revelation of the unfathomable One. The sacred word (*sabad* or *bani*) is the fusion of content and form. The glittering Truth is the Divine, so is the true verse (*sachi bani* # 23). And just as “the Divine itself is diamond, itself jewel (*ape heera rattan* (# 25)), “the Guru’s word is a jewel studded with diamonds – *Guru ka sabadu ratanu hai heerai jitu jarau*” (# 25). The dazzling joy of the Guru is an effect of the aural brilliance. Guru Amar Das artistically conveys that the language itself is the Divine subject and the very source of his ecstasy. Overall, the Anand hymn makes the reader/hearer sensitive to the sensuousness of spiritual poetry and inspires them to reexperience the full physicality, dynamism, and *elan vital* of the Gurus’ words. The music the Guru hears is delivered from *anahad* – the “soundless sound”! This subtle self-producing sound, or what is called “unstruck sound,” vibrates constantly in the universe. But one becomes aware of it by hearing (*sunia*) the sacred melodies. The Guru’s verse raises human consciousness and evokes the desire for the Divine.

So how is it accessed? Not by mechanical repetitions or external techniques but by a profound aesthetic experience. The Guru rejects ritualistic chanting: “by the tongue incessantly reciting *hari hari* no knowledge is gained about what is said – *hari hari nit karahi rasana kahia kachu na jani*” (# 24). Rather, the sacred verse has to be heard, seen, tasted, and felt in the depths of the self. The Guru gives concrete instructions to tap into the body and utilize each of its organs to realize its sacred potential. Knowledge for him is not antithetical to the aesthetic experience. He proceeds methodically, step by step, creating opportunities to reflect and expand on what is heard, seen, tasted, and enjoyed. He even raises questions, which make his instruction come out alive (#35). In several passages, he engages dialogically with the various parts of his body – with



his tongue (#32), with his body (#33, #35), with his eyes (#36), with his ears (#37), and with his breath (#38), culminating his dialogue with “home” (*ghari*, #39) – each instance underscoring divine realization as its ultimate objective. Through his poetic strategy, the Guru impacts his reader at a visceral level and puts them in touch with their own body and senses. The term “*ghari*” in his last stanza is purposefully ambiguous. It evokes a host of images that expand the self: “*ghari*” could be the physical body enshrining the divine word, the home where people live with their families, the space shared with one’s community, the planet earth – home to every living being. Thus the Guru lyrically and most effectively launches his readers to experience the total unicity he enjoys. Structurally, the finale reiterates the opening, and so the Anand hymn is a perfect literary composition. The verses of the fourth and fifth Guru drive Guru Amar Das’s message forward.

To conclude, the Anand hymn is an integrative mechanism that at the personal level connects mind and body; socially, the Sikhs with one another; historically, the community with their Gurus; spiritually, the reader with the transcendent Divine; and ultimately, the individual with humanity at large.

## Cross-References

- [Akhand Path](#)
- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Nitnem](#)
- [Sabda](#)
- [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Arvind M, Shackle C (eds and trans) (2005) Teachings of the Sikh gurus: selections from the Sikh scriptures. Routledge, London/New York
2. Mann GS (2001) The making of Sikh scripture. Oxford University Press, New York
3. McLeod WH (1990) Textual sources for the study of Sikhism. University of Chicago, Chicago

4. Singh P (2000) The guru Granth: canon, meaning and authority. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
5. Singh N-GK (2001) The name of my beloved: verses of the Sikh gurus. Penguin, New Delhi
6. Singh N-GK (2012) Of desire sacred and secular. I.B. Tauris, New York

---

## Anandpur Sahib Resolution

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

---

## Anhad Nad

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Anna Prasanam

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Annaprashana

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Antithesis

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Apprehension

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Architecture

- [Architecture \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Architecture (Sikh)

### ► Art (Sikhism)

## Architecture (Sikhism)

Tavleen Kaur  
University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

### Synonyms

Architecture; Buildings; Design; Urbanism

### Definition

Sikh gurdwaras, defensive and memorial structures, and urban and social space across the world.

### Introduction

This section covers three sections on Sikh architecture – *gurdwaras*, defensive and memorial structures, and urban and social space. Since the architecture of a people represents their story through their built environment, each of these sections shows how the buildings discussed therein collectively represent Sikhs and *Sikhi* over the last few centuries. The material covered in this section provides a historical and architectural overview of buildings linked to Sikhs throughout the world, especially those in the diasporas outside of South Asia.

### Gurdwaras

#### Overview

A *gurdwara* is a Sikh place of prayer and gathering. The term *gurdwara* comprises of two words – *Guru*, enlightened teacher, and *dwar*, doorway. The literal meaning of the word is doorway through which to reach the Guru, Guru Granth



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 1** A Nishan Sahib outside Thara Sahib, a gurdwara linked to Guru Tegh Bahadur. It is located in the Harimandar Sahib complex

Sahib. Generally, gurdwara refers to the entire building complex and all its components. A gurdwara is easily identifiable as there is a *nishan sahib* (flag pole) outside of the building (see Image 1). A saffron or navy colored flag with a *khanda* (Sikh emblem) print is hoisted on the nishan sahib. It is the exterior marker of a gurdwara space. On the interior, the *darbar* hall is the key space in a gurdwara as Guru Granth Sahib is housed therein. Congregational services are held in the darbar hall.

Another important component of gurdwaras is the *langar* hall, the kitchen space in which volunteers cook and serve free meals (see Images 2 and 3). Collectively, the darbar and langar halls represent two key concepts of *Sikhi* – *sangat* and *pangat*. When gathered in the darbar hall, the congregation is referred to as *sangat*. In the langar hall, it is referred to as *pangat*, a term which literally means row or line. Forming rows, devotees sit on the floor to eat langar. Guru Nanak started the tradition of langar and sitting in pangat.



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 2** Volunteers preparing langar in the kitchen at Mata Gujri Langar Hall at Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

The underlying idea of pangat is that societal hierarchies that people associate themselves with are dissolved since everyone sits on common ground and at the same level. Those who are unable to sit on the floor due to medical conditions or old age are accommodated with chairs and tables on which to eat langar. Many gurdwara complexes also have a *sarovar*, pool, for devotees to perform ablution services (see Image 4).

Early gurdwaras dating back to the time of the Gurus were most likely simple structures made with local materials of mud bricks and limestone mortar. The term for these early structures is *dharamsala* (place of worship and rest house for travelers). Though the early *dharamsala* buildings have not survived, contemporary folk artists' renditions of the Gurus, especially of Guru Nanak, depict him preaching to a *sangat* in or outside a modest, small-scale building of a local or vernacular typology (see Image 5). In the contemporary Sikh world, gurdwaras have replaced *dharamsalas* in terms of building size, design, and materials.

The preeminent example of Sikh architecture in the *gurdwara* typology is *Harimandar Sahib* in Amritsar, Punjab (see Image 6). The *Harimandar Sahib* complex, as it stands today, is a product of

**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 3** Visitors sitting in Pangat eating langar outside



**Architecture (Sikhism),  
Image 4** The sarovar at  
the gurdwara in Sur Singh  
Pind, Amritsar



A

**Architecture (Sikhism),  
Image 5** A painter's  
rendition of Guru Nanak  
[center] with devotees,  
sitting in the courtyard of  
a typical, vernacular-  
tradition home



five centuries of construction, demolition, reconstruction, and expansion. It completely fulfills the function of a *gurdwara* – it is a total environment that brings together religious, social, and political facets of the Sikh world. In 1574 Guru Ram Das purchased some land and thus began the establishment of a major Sikh urban center, the town currently known as Amritsar. The first project was construction of a sarovar, which was finished in 1581. Five years later, Guru Arjan Dev further renovated the sarovar and began construction of

the first structure at the site—the Harimandar itself. The building was finished in 1601.

Due to continuing conflict between Sikh, Mughal, and Afghan invaders, the Harimandar Sahib complex was a target of attack and desecration several times. There is no surviving evidence of the original *Harimandar* structure, as it was badly damaged when it was attacked in 1762 by Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani. Sikhs had rebuilt the damaged structure by 1776. This structure is what survives today as the *Harimandar*





**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 6** Harimandar Sahib, Amritsar

*Sahib gurdwara*. Under the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the gurdwara building was covered in gilded copper in 1830, leading to the structure being referred to as “Golden Temple.” A visit to Harimandar Sahib today leads visitors to go through the Darshani Deori, the entrance gate that provides a direct view of the Gurdwara. Descending down several steps from the entrance, the axis to the main entrance of the Harimandar Sahib becomes visible, and visitors can be seen making their way around the *parikarma* – a 60-ft-wide marble perimeter around the building decorated with inlaid pieces of colorful stones.

The first and original structure of Harimandar Sahib was finished under the direction of Guru Arjan. After its completion, the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, began construction of *Akal Takht* (throne of God, the timeless Being). The current *Akal Takht* building is a modified and reconstructed version of the original building (see Image 7). In 1764 Durrani attacked Amritsar again and targeted and destroyed *Akal Takht*. Sikhs reconstructed the building by 1774; after which, Maharaja Ranjit Singh expanded the

building around the same time he had the Harimandar Sahib building plated with gilded copper. Then, in 1984, the Indian Army attacked the *Harimandar* complex, completely destroying *Akal Takht*. What stands today is a replica of the five-storey *Akal Takht* as it looked after the Maharaja’s expansion of the structure.

*Akal Takht* is one of five takhts. The other four are *Hazur Sahib* in Maharashtra, *Keshgarh* and *Damdama Sahib* in Punjab, and *Patna Sahib* in Bihar. These five takhts are gurdwaras in essence, in that each one of them has a darbar hall that contains Guru Granth Sahib, a langar hall, as well as *sarais* (hostels) for visitors. However, they are recognized as not only significant gurdwaras but also as takhts. As such, they represent Sikh temporal authority. Each takht has a *jathedar* (leader). Every so often *jathedars* of the *takhts* meet and pass *matas* (resolutions) on issues that affect the whole of the Sikh *Panth* (community). Each of these *takhts* represents a crucial moment of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Sikh history, especially linked to Guru Gobind Singh. Patna Sahib marks his birthplace,

Keshgarh Sahib marks where he established Khalsa, Damdama Sahib marks where the Guru finalized the *Adi Granth*, and Hazur Sahib marks where he passed away.



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 7** Akal Takht, Amritsar

In an effort toward institution building, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a patron of expansion and reconstruction of many gurdwaras across Punjab and present-day Pakistan. Construction of new *gurdwara* buildings on the site of older structures was a common trend under his patronage. The five takhts are the product of his patronage. Therefore, though many gurdwaras like the *takhts* are regarded as historical shrines, the buildings that represent them mostly date back to the time of the Maharaja and represent the spread of Sikh arts and architecture under his reign (1801–1839).

#### Traditional Gurdwara Architecture Outside of South Asia

*Gurdwaras* are more than just places of prayer and gathering. They represent the backbone of the Sikh community in which they are situated. As Sikhs began to migrate out of India to Western countries, a desire to establish a collective identity and a common meeting place amidst completely new lives in foreign lands led to the establishment of gurdwaras over a century ago. Sikh immigrant communities in places like Abbotsford, British Columbia, and Stockton, California, gathered enough funds to raise the first Sikh *gurdwaras* in North America in 1911 and 1912, respectively (see Images 8 and 9). These early wooden structures were modest in comparison to contemporary *gurdwaras* in the diaspora today. They were built according to their local traditions and materials

**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 8** The Abbotsford, British Columbia, gurdwara, built in 1911 (Image courtesy of MSA Museum Society, [www.msamuseum.ca](http://www.msamuseum.ca))





**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 9** Sikh Temple, Stockton, California, in 1912

and responded to the local vernacular of Stockton and Abbotsford. At present, the Stockton *gurdwara* has been rebuilt on a larger scale but in a manner that still pays homage to the original structure. The Abbotsford *gurdwara* remains in its original form and scale and is still used as a *gurdwara*.

Sikh immigrants in the United Kingdom, Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Australia have also built impressive *gurdwara* structures. The history of *gurdwara* building in these diasporas is essentially the history of Sikh immigrants in these lands. In many of these locations, *gurdwaras* first started out as rented spaces in existing buildings. Gradually, after gathering funds and buying land, some diaspora Sikhs were able to build *gurdwaras* from the ground up. In such cases, *gurdwara* management committees have tried hard to replicate the architectural language of traditional *gurdwaras* in South Asia. Custom-built domes are often featured on Western *gurdwaras*, giving them a distinct look from the other buildings surrounding them. In this way, Western *gurdwaras* are quite noticeable not only because of *nishan sahibs* that stand outside the structures but also because domes line what are otherwise flat roofs.

Buildings like Sikh Gurdwara Sahib in San Jose, California, and Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Bedford, England, not only have adopted the architectural language of onion domes but also have made articulated arches and arched courtyards part of their design (see Images 10 and 11). Both these *gurdwaras* are products of the late 1990s and early 2000s. These, and other such *gurdwaras*, are equipped with the basic elements of a *gurdwara* – *darbar* and *langar* halls, as well as classrooms for Punjabi language and Sikh philosophy classes. In this way, *gurdwaras* have evolved from simple, rented structures to grand monuments in the cities and towns they are situated in. They are the centers of Sikh activity for their local communities and stand testament to the achievement of Sikhs in the West.

#### Nontraditional Gurdwara Architecture Outside of South Asia

There are many impressive and large-scale *gurdwaras* all across the world. Though most of these *gurdwaras* are designed such that they reflect as closely as possible the typical *gurdwara* layout and design as found in South Asia, there are some which stand out due to their unique



**Architecture (Sikhism),**

**Image 10** Sikh Gurdwara Sahib, San Jose, California (Image Courtesy of Jasleen Kaur)

**Architecture (Sikhism),**

**Image 11** Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Bedford, England



architecture. Gurdwaras like Hacienda de Guru Ram Das in New Mexico, USA; Sikh Temple of Makindu in Kenya; and the Silat Road Gurdwara in Singapore are structures which borrow South Asian gurdwara architectural motifs just as much as they respond to their native condition and climate (see Images 12, 13, and 14).

Hacienda de Guru Ram Das, located in Espanola, New Mexico, integrates adobe architecture that is found throughout the American Southwestern region. The *gurdwara* presents a beautiful conglomeration of regional architecture of the area as well as an acute understanding of traditional gurdwara motifs and the kinds of spaces

**Architecture (Sikhism),**

**Image 12** Hacienda de  
Guru Ram Das in Espanola,  
New Mexico, USA



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 13** Sikh Temple of  
Makindu in Kenya (Image Courtesy of Tripat Singh)

required to accommodate Sikh sangat and religious services. The building design takes advantage of smooth adobe and log construction, into which a language of arches and a central dome is

blended seamlessly to form a gurdwara that is as much a product of regionalism as it is South Asian influence. Two flags are raised outside the building – one is a nishan sahib and the other is a flag of the United States, symbolizing that the structure represents a community that has been established in the area for over 40 years and is well integrated into its larger context.

Sikhs arrived in Africa in the late 1800s as an employment force for the construction of railways. Within a few years of their arrival, Sikhs began to build *gurdwaras* in the places they lived in, mostly in East Africa. Of the many gurdwaras in Africa, the one in Makindu, Kenya, is particularly interesting architecturally. Ever since its foundation was laid in 1926, the *gurdwara* complex has continued to grow. What started out as a simple structure to accommodate the Sikh sangat in and around Makindu with religious programs and langar has now grown to a complex that has an impressive fortlike entrance gate, a free hospital for all, apartment housing for visitors, and a garden which provides produce for langar. The Makindu establishment is quite unique in its own right in that it feels like a small Sikh village in Kenya. The *gurdwara* building is a two-storey structure whose front façade is divided into three arched bays. The white structure stands out





**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 14** Silat Road Gurdwara in Singapore (Image Courtesy of Chooyut Shing)

against the dark-red soil on which it sits. The *gurdwara* and all the other buildings in the complex are built to accommodate the desert heat. The main *gurdwara* structure has an open and airy feel to it due to the large arches that open up the cuboid structure, make it seem weightless, and allow for cross ventilation throughout the building.

Just as Hacienda de Guru Ram Das and the Makindu *gurdwara* are exemplary structures that display an impressive history of Sikh settlement outside of South Asia, the Silat Road *gurdwara* in Singapore is a building that speaks of the century-long presence of Sikhs in Singapore. The *gurdwara* is actually listed on Singapore's National Heritage Board as a historic landmark. The two-storey *gurdwara* building is easily recognizable as its white, domed structure stands amidst high-rise structures. The building façade is punctuated with bays of three arches each, a pattern that goes all around the perimeter of the structure. If not for its iconic central and side domes, the structure would register to a viewer as a neo-Renaissance. The entrance portal of the *gurdwara* building is actually designed as a Greek temple front. Parts of it even echo details of Art Deco wall and façade treatment. The *gurdwara* building has been renovated since its

original construction finished in 1924. After a multimillion dollar renovation and expansion, the *gurdwara* complex now has a seven-storey tower dedicated to a pioneer Sikh in Singapore. The listing of Silat Road Gurdwara as a monument of national significance, continuous expansion, and its ability to survive amidst a metropolis full of modern buildings makes it a unique and important component of the history of contemporary Singapore and its Sikh settlements.

#### Setting Precedent Through Scale, Technology, and Adaptive Reuse

Sikhs have been in the United Kingdom for over a half century, and in this time they have rented, constructed, renovated, and rebuilt hundreds of buildings for *gurdwara* purposes. Of the most recently constructed ones, Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Southall and Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara in Birmingham in England are two of the largest *gurdwaras* in Europe (see Images 15 and 16). The Southall *gurdwara* was finished in 2003, and its construction costs over £17.5 million. The reasons for its large budget are that the building was architecturally designed with custom finishes and expensive materials. The structure has many beautiful details like stained glass



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 15** Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Southall, England (Courtesy of SGSS Gurdwara)

**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 16** Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara in Birmingham, England (Image courtesy of Arvind Mandair)



windows, a timber patterned and engineered dome in the main darbar hall, metal latticework, and intricate concrete formwork. Since singing of *kirtan* (hymns) is the largest component of gurdwara services, the Southall gurdwara construction committee also hired acousticians to work with architects and engineers. Typically the most recognizable symbols of Sikh architecture are its domes,

arches, and arcades. The Southall *gurdwara* also incorporates all of these typical elements but accents them with fine details and materials on an impressive scale. The result is a magnificent limestone and granite-clad structure with a gold-leaf-covered central dome that is as impressive on the outside as it is inside – where it can house up to 2,500 visitors at one point.

**Architecture (Sikhism),**

**Image 17** Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh Temple in Dubai, UAE (Image courtesy of Guru Nanak Darbar, Dubai)



A

Located just a little over 100 miles from Southall is the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha's gurdwara building complex in Birmingham. The origins of the five-storey structure date back to 1970s. Since its establishment, the *gurdwara* has grown to occupy an entire city block. The buildings of the *gurdwara* complex that sit on the block present an interesting mix of traditional gurdwara motifs as well as annexes that do not look anything like a Sikh *gurdwara*. The traditionally designed parts of the building are easily identifiable as gurdwara structures because of the domes, arched doorways and windows, *jharokhas* (protruding windows), and the entrance portal. The latter has a tripartite façade on the ground level that resembles portals found in Gothic cathedrals. In this way, the main building design ties into a century-old building tradition found all over Europe, while simultaneously retaining a visual language of *gurdwara* motifs. Attached to the main building is a newer annex, the Nishkam Centre – a multipurpose building used for Sikh philosophy, music, and Punjabi classes, as well as vocational education. The Soho Road gurdwara, as the entire complex is referred to, is a great example of the integration of Sikhs living in Britain in a manner that connects them to both their roots in South Asia as well as their settlement in and contribution to British society.

The largest diaspora communities of Sikhs are in the United States, Canada, and England. Though Sikhs in the Middle East and Australia are much fewer in comparison, they are equally as

keen on building gurdwaras for their local communities. A case in point is the Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh Temple in Dubai (see Image 17). Even though United Arab Emirates is a monarchy and an Islamic State, plurality in terms of praxis and religious architecture is allowed. Permission to build, however, has to be granted. Sikhs in Dubai secured permission to build Guru Nanak Darbar. As of 2011, the building is still under construction. The architecturally designed structure spreads out over 100,000 square feet and has two subterranean floors and two floors above. The design also features a *parikarma* (circumambulatory path around a structure) and a pool – both elements inspired from the design and layout of Harimandar Sahib in Amritsar. In the growing metropolis of Dubai, in which unprecedented vertical growth has enjoyed much space in architectural debates, Guru Nanak Darbar is a large structure lying low on the horizontal plane. It is a structure that completely contradicts the architectonic environment of Dubai where the focus is on megastructures that push the limits of engineering and architectural design. This *gurdwara* pushes the same limits, but on the horizontal axis. The domed roof of the structure spans nearly 60 ft and hovers over the main darbar hall without vertical structural support. Though Sikhs have not been living in the Middle East for nearly as long as they have in England, Canada, and America, they have started a gurdwara architectural legacy unlike that in the West or even in South Asia.





**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 18** The historic building used by the Sikh community in Adelaide, Australia (Image Courtesy of the Sikh Society of South Australia)

Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai is setting a precedent in Sikh architecture in terms of scale, location, and design. The built environment of Sikhs in Dubai is beginning to take shape. A *gurdwara* in Adelaide, Australia, is also making history but in a different manner. One Sikh community in South Australia did not build the structure from the ground up, as is generally the case when Sikh communities want to establish gurdwaras in their towns. Rather, they purchased a historic building that dates back to 1864 (see Image 18). The building has heritage value as it holds recognized landmark status. As of a few years ago, it has been appropriated to a *gurdwara*. The structure does not look like a typical *gurdwara*, as it does not have domes, cupolas, arches, and other motifs found in other gurdwaras. Though the trend of adaptive reuse is common across the worldwide diaspora, seldom have Sikhs purchased a historic landmark and transformed it for their own use. The Adelaide *gurdwara* sets precedence due to its situation in a locally

recognized historic structure, thereby allowing Sikhs to integrate into the local built and social heritage and retain their Sikhi roots. Reusing a building rather than demolishing an older structure and building a new one in its place leaves a large ecological footprint. In this way, the Adelaide *gurdwara* is also an example of conservation – an important ecological concept in *Gurbani* (hymns contained in Guru Granth Sahib).

### Defensive and Memorial Structures

The contemporary building scene and sprawl of Punjab is often in contestation with the historic built fabric of the state. In rural areas especially, people have built around remnants of historic structures, used construction materials from them, or demolished dilapidated buildings and built over them. Many of these old structures are *qilas* (forts) from the eighteenth century onward and are linked to the former royal and other prominent families of the Punjab region. Part of the aristocratic lifestyle entailed building great



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 19** New houses built around the remaining tower of Burail Qila near Chandigarh

monuments and structures that represented the families' wealth and status. These *qilas* were mini-cities in themselves. Though they had all the parts a defensive structure would, like ramparts, moats, watchtowers, and crenellated rooftops, they were also residential buildings with highly hierarchical spaces. Two examples of Punjab's *qilas* are the one in Burail near Chandigarh and the one in Nabha (see Images 19 and 20).

Burail, a suburb of the capital city of Chandigarh, is a small town built around the remains of a fort. Two bastions and some parts of the boundary wall remain and feature thick walled construction designed to withstand attack. As is the case of many historic sites, limited information on their origin, builders, and inhabitants exists. Elderly locals of Burail refer to the fort being used in 1769 by Sikh armies. Guided by General Banda Singh Bahadur, Sikhs fought and won a battle against the invading Mughal Army. People settled in Burail have built new houses in the *qila's* parameters. In some cases new construction shares boundary walls with the old *qila*. As a result, the entire settlement along the fort is a juxtaposition of historic and contemporary construction. The Burail *qila* example tells a story of

**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 20** A view of the courtyard and the main building of the Nabha Qila





much of the historic architecture in Punjab. Since such buildings are not protected monuments, people have settled in and around them, establishing their own homes and towns in the same territory.

The *qila* at Nabha dates back to the nineteenth century and is linked to the Phulkian family of Punjab. Now, over 250 years since its creation, the town of Nabha flourishes as a modern town with an eclectic mix of architecture, ranging from historic *havelis* (palatial residences) to contemporary *kothis* (mansions).

Compared to other forts in Punjab, the Nabha *Qila* marks a change in building techniques and preferences. Typical elements, such as the monumental gate and doors, rounded arches, and living quarters centered around a large open courtyard, are still a part of the architectural program at this *qila*. The changes, however, are subtle and numerous. Unlike its predecessors, this complex is not only built of Nanakshahi bricks; portions with eroded or fallen off surface treatment reveal that thicker bricks were also used in the construction at Nabha *Qila*.

In the open courtyard-like space between the main entry portal and living space following it are elements of architectural details that are unique to this *qila*. This three-storey space includes what look very much like engaged Doric columns in its structure. Past this portion, in the main courtyard, the windows of the residential parts of the building also catch the visitor by surprise. They are oval (as opposed to arched) in shape and are latticed together with the thick bricks. Elsewhere in the complex, traces of wooden details that once adorned windows and doors are still visible. Unlike the Burail *qila*, the one at Nabha is a protected monument and is under the care of the Nabha Foundation Trust, a private organization that has plans for the preservation of the structure.

Another typology of the built environment of aristocratic families was that of *samadh*s (mausoleums). These memorial types were built to preserve the memory of prominent religious and political figures. *Samadh*s of various scales are found all over South Asia. Those of religious figures are believed to have special spiritual powers into which devotees can tap in hopes of

favorable results to wishes. Though building of *samadh*s is prohibited according to the Sikh *Rahit Maryada*, it is a typology that gained considerable importance, especially in eighteenth-century Punjab. Building a *samadh* was a means that ensured the continuity of the legacy attached to individuals. Therefore, constructing *samadh*s was viewed as a component of cultural and social life. Some *samadh*s were elaborately designed with murals covering their interior and exterior surfaces. One of the most impressive *samadh*s is of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, a political and religious figure who lived during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (see Image 21). His *samadh* is located near Anandpur Sahib. It dates back to almost the mid-nineteenth century. Its polychromatic façade is punctured with stucco relief work, and it has articulated three arches on each of its eight sides. The domes aligning the edge of the roof are reminiscent of the roof structure of Harimandar Sahib. The octagonal structure is still visited today by devotees who believe the *samadh* shrine has miraculous powers.

Since Baba Sahib Singh Bedi was a prominent figure in eighteenth-century Punjab, it makes sense that such an elaborate *samadh* has been built to honor his life. His is the largest one in a complex of several *samadh*s of the Bedi family. It is rare to come across *samadh*s of Sikh women. In the Bedis' *samadh* complex, there are some that honor the women of the Bedi family. The *samadh* of Mata Naraen Devi stands to the left of her husband's, Suraj Singh Bedi (see Image 22). The building is a simple structure with a square plan. It has arched windows and doorways on each side, as well as a small domed room rising from the central chamber. From the bricks and cement visible in between them, it appears that much restoration has been done to the structure of the *samadh*. The main façade has also been partially whitewashed, although it is unlikely that there were every any wall paintings on and in the *samadh*. Unlike the brick or sandstone-clad domes on other *samadh*s in the complex, this one appears to be made of concrete, suggesting again that what stands today is a much restored version from the original. It is remarkable to find a *samadh* dedicated to a woman. Moreover, it is

**Architecture (Sikhism),**  
**Image 21** Samadh of  
 Baba Sahib Singh Bedi in  
 Una, Himachal Pradesh



**Architecture (Sikhism),**  
**Image 22** Samadh of  
 Mata Naraen Devi in Una,  
 Himachal Pradesh



even more fascinating that hers is placed amidst samadhs dedicated to the men of the family.

### Urban and Social Space

Sikh Gurus established urban centers wherever they settled. Guru Nanak started an establishment in Kartarpur, Guru Angad at Khadur Sahib, Guru Amar Das at Goindval, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan at Amritsar, Guru Hargobind at

Hargobindpur, and Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur. Each of these establishments started out with the respective Guru locating there to start centers for Sikh education. Over time, these small establishments have turned into large cities and towns that continue to have majority Sikh populations and large gurdwaras. The growth of Amritsar is a remarkable dynamic to chart, as it shows how *muhallas* were populated



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 23** Ramgarhia Bunga in the Harimandar Sahib Complex in Amritsar. The twin towers were reconstructed after they were destroyed in 1984. The original structure of the building lies on the ground floor and two subterranean floors

according to the kind of expertise and businesses of its residents. The names of these muhallas, as well as the markets contained therein, continue to exist, although on a different scale than of the original between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Another prominent urban typology was that of *bungas* (tower or rest house). Up until early to the mid-twentieth century, there were several *bungas* all around Amritsar. They were built to serve as rest houses, as well as centers for education and meeting places. Ramgarhia Bunga from the late eighteenth century still survives in Amritsar, although its two towers were recently renovated (see Image 23).

Because a large focus of Sikhi is gathering in *sangat* for *kirtan* (singing hymns) and *path* (reciting hymns), it makes sense that gurdwaras are designed to accommodate these functions. However, not all gurdwara programs take place

indoors. Some gurdwaras' design allows for great gatherings to be held outdoors. Since the Harimandar Sahib complex is often cited as an exemplary site of Sikh architecture, looking at its design reveals the urban spaces built within and their importance on a daily basis. The *parikarma* and the Akal Takht forecourt are urban spaces in that they are located within the urban context of the city of Amritsar, yet they seem unconnected to the world outside the Harimandar Sahib complex. The *parikarma* around Darbar Sahib is a space that is constantly in use (see Image 24). Since there is not much sitting room inside Darbar Sahib, devotees use the *parikarma* as a place to sit in and enjoy the view, sound, and feel of the complex. Volunteers wash the inside of Darbar Sahib and the *parikarma* early each morning. The *parikarma* also outlines the sarovar, allowing devotees to sit right along the edge of the water. Additionally, devotees can be seen manually mopping the *parikarma* all throughout the day. The *parikarma* is a space that distances visitors from hustle of the city outside the complex and ushers them into the peaceful atmosphere of Harimandar Sahib. Within the *parikarma*, located just in front of Akal Takht is a large forecourt (see Image 25). This open space is used by *dhadi jathas* (ballad singers) to perform to an audience that uses the space, thereby transforming it into an outdoor theater. It is the starting point of the daily early-morning procession in which Guru Granth Sahib is carried from Akal Takht to Darbar Sahib. Though this space may seem insignificant when not occupied by *dhadi jathas* or Sikh officials delivering speeches or for the few minutes it is used early morning, it holds tremendous sentimental value for the Sikh world. A small portion of the pre-1984 attack Akal Takht survives and is encased in a glass wall on the ground floor. The forecourt also connects viewers to this surviving wall portion. One can imagine what early Amritsar was like with its modest architecture, mercantile urban setting, various *bungas* representing different services available to residents and visitors, and an ever-present focus on the microcosm of the Sikh world – Harimandar Sahib.





**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 24** Visitors and devotees gathered in the Parikarma at Harimandar Sahib



**Architecture (Sikhism), Image 25** A crowd gathered in the forecourt of Akal Takht. They are sitting between the Darshan Deorhi gate behind them and the Akal Takht building facing them

## Cross-References

- [Art \(Sikh\)](#)
- [Sikhi](#)

## References

1. Grewal R (2009) Colonialism and urbanization in India: the Punjab region. Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi
2. Subhash P (2009) Architectural heritage of a Sikh State: Faridkot. Aryan Books International, New Delhi
3. Heitzman J (2008) The city in South Asia. Routledge, London
4. Banga I (ed) (2007) Five Punjabi centuries: policy, society, economy and culture. c. 1500–1990. Essays for J.S. Grewal. Manohar, New Delhi
5. Grewal R, Pall S (eds) (2005) Precolonial and colonial Punjab: society, economy, politics and culture. Essays for Indu Banga. Manohar, New Delhi
6. Singh M (2005) Forts, palaces and Havelis of Panjab. USB Publishers, New Delhi
7. Qaisar I (2001) Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan. Punjabi History Board, Lahore
8. Stronge S (ed) (1999) Sikh art and literature. Routledge, London
9. Tatla DS (1999) The Sikh Diaspora: the search for statehood. UCL Press, London
10. Bhandari V (1998) Historicizing the “Public:” the making of a social formation in nineteenth century Punjab. PhD dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
11. Barrier NG, Singh P (1996) The transmission of Sikh heritage in the Diaspora. Manohar, New Delhi
12. Kaur P, Singh V (1996) Kar Sewa of historical Gurdwaras. Sapra Publications, Delhi
13. Singh G (1995) Historical Sikh Shrines. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
14. Ahluwalia JS, Dilgeer HS (1994) Sri Akal Takht Sahib: a symbol of Divine Sovereignty. Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh
15. Singh H (ed) (1994) Sikh Heritage, Gurdwaras and memorials in Pakistan. Asian Publication Services, New Delhi
16. Singh P (1992) Gurdwaras: in India and around the world. Himalayan Books, New Delhi
17. Arshi PS (1989) The Golden Temple: history, art and architecture. Harman Publishing House, New Delhi
18. Singh K (1989) Law of religious institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
19. Gauba A (1988) Amritsar, a study in urban history (1840–1947). ABS Publications, Jalandhar
20. Singh D (1987) The Sikh art and architecture. Panjab University, Chandigarh
21. Arshi PS (1986) Sikh architecture in Punjab. Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi
22. Dilgeer HS (1980) The Akal Takht. Punjabi Book Company, Jalandhar
23. Das G (1975) Grewal JS, Banga I (ed and trans) Early nineteenth century Punjab. From Ganesh Das’ Char Bagh-i-Panjab. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
24. Singh T (1967) Historical Sikh Shrines in Delhi. Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, New Delhi
25. Mohammad WK (1962) Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan. Department of Archaeology, Karachi
26. Singh T (1922) The Gurdwara reform and the Sikh awakening. SGPC, Amritsar

---

## Argumentation

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Arjan (Guru)

Pashaura Singh  
Department of Religious Studies,  
University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[Guru](#); [Sikhism](#)

## Definition

The fifth Guru in the Sikh tradition.

## Life and Work of Guru Arjan

### Guru Arjan in Context

Guru Arjan (1563–1606) was the fifth Guru in the Sikh tradition. He occupied the middle position in the spiritual lineage established by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), starting with the designation of Guru Angad (1504–1552) as his legitimate successor and ending with the death of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and the last human Guru of the Sikhs. As a matter of fact, a theory of spiritual succession was advanced in the form of the “unity of the office of the Guru,” in which

there was no difference between the founder and the successors. They all represented the same light (*jot*), as a single flame ignites a series of torches.

The historical setting of Guru Arjan's period falls within the rule of two of the Mughal emperors, Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and Jahangir (r. 1605–1628). Both of them took notice of his activities in their official memoirs. His life may be divided into three discreet periods, each of unique character: (1) the first 11 years at Goindval located on the imperial highway between Delhi and Lahore, (2) the next 7 years at Ramdaspur and Lahore, and (3) the final 25 years of his tenure at Ramdaspur and neighboring areas. Arjan was born in 1563 at Goindval during the reign of Emperor Akbar and grew to maturity in a period of relative peace and prosperity. His father was Guru Ram Das, a Sodhi Khatri living in the town of Goindval at the time, and his mother was Bibi Bhani, the daughter of the third Guru, Amar Das. As a Khatri boy, Arjan learned several languages – Gurmukhi from Baba Buddha, Sanskrit from Pandits Keso and Gopal, and Persian from the local Muslim school ([1], p. 30). The experience of these formative years spent at Goindval in the presence of his maternal grandfather, Guru Amar Das, who died peacefully at the ripe age of 95 on 1 September 1574, became an integral part of Arjan's memory, shaping his perceptions and choices in the future.

In designating his son-in-law as his successor, Guru Amar Das instructed him to create a new spiritual center. This was done in anticipation of opposition from his sons, who could lay a legal claim on the establishment at Goindval for themselves. Therefore, Guru Ram Das moved to Ramdaspur along with his family in 1574, and his loyal disciples followed him. He took on the project of constructing a large pool in the center of the new establishment for the purpose of bathing. The founding of a new town and excavating of the large pool point toward mobilization of considerable resources by the fourth Guru. For this purpose he appointed deputies (*masands*) to collect voluntary offerings and other contributions from loyal Sikhs. In this relatively new environment of full building projects at Ramdaspur, Arjan grew to adulthood under the close attention of his parents. He received training in classical *rags*

(“melodies”) from both resident and visiting musicians. At the age of 16, he married Ganga Devi in 1579. Following the Punjabi cultural tradition of *muklava*, the bride came from her parents' home to stay with her husband after a gap of a few years. His father sent Arjan to Lahore for the next 2 years to set up the morning and evening patterns of Sikh worship among the congregations. He frequently visited Sufi centers where he came in contact with Shaikh Mir Muhammad (1550–1635) of the Qadiri order, popularly known as Mian Mir in the Sikh tradition. The vibrant atmosphere of Lahore provided Arjan with the opportunity to interact with people of different faiths and to test the veracity of his own ideas in religious dialogues. It broadened his awareness of the contemporary world, a fact which is quite reflected in his works throughout the *Adi Granth*.

Guru Ram Das chose Arjan to succeed him before he passed away on 1 September 1581. The beginning of his ministry was, however, marked by determined enmity from his eldest brother, Prithi Chand, who openly challenged his right to succeed their father. As “an organizer, systematizer, formalizer,” to use Wilfred Cantwell Smith's terminology, Guru Arjan played an extremely important role in the process of crystallization of the Sikh tradition. His reign was marked by a number of far-reaching institutional developments. First, the construction of the Darbar Sahib amidst the sacred pool of Amritsar was the momentous achievement of his building program. It acquired prominence as the central place of Sikh worship. Second, Guru Arjan compiled the prototype of the *Adi Granth* in 1604, reflecting his editorial perspective in the five major guiding principles: (1) doctrinal consistency, (2) the ideal of balanced life, (3) the spirit of optimism, (4) the inclusive ideal, and (5) concern for a distinctive Sikh identity ([2], pp. 151–176). The *Adi Granth* provided a framework for the shaping of a text-centered community and hence it became the decisive factor for Sikh self-definition. Third, the installation of the *Adi Granth* in the Darbar Sahib in 1604 enhanced its centrality in Sikh life. As a result, the city of Ramdaspur emerged as a new “power center” in

its own right. Here, Guru Arjan had established the divine rule of justice and humility (*halemi raj*) where people enjoyed comfortable living, fired with the spirit of fearlessness, dignity, and self-respect.

The contemporary Sikh bards sang eulogistic songs of the majesty of the Sikh court in regal metaphors. They had the firsthand experience of Guru Arjan's life that they perceived in the light of their own background knowledge in ancient Indian mythology. For them, Guru Arjan had reestablished the golden age of truth (*satiyuga*) in the age of ultimate degeneracy and brought back the rule of mythological king, Raja Janak, back on Earth. They used the past to ground the present and found the future, but in the process, Guru Arjan's spiritual reign became incomparably greater for them than any earthly kingdom. If one reads them carefully, they do illuminate certain observable personal characteristics of the Guru. Accordingly, Guru Arjan is the one who is wholly detached from the world, yet fully involved in the household; one who possesses the virtues of compassion, enthusiastic disposition (*mani chau na huttai*), cool demeanor (*sital*), altruistic concern for others (*par pir nivanan*), and constancy of devotion to the divine Name ([3], pp. 85–89).

Guru Arjan was a prolific poet who gave expression to his mystical experience in simple direct hymns of superb esthetic beauty. The profile that emerges from these hymns reveals a man of disarming humility with an extreme sense of mission. From his *Sukhmani*, one gets the impression of a person of “motherly affection,” nurturing the children with reassurance and tender love yet ignoring their faults and ungratefulness. He never directly referred to himself as the Guru, but always maintained his identity as a servant (*sevak*) of God. He always spoke through Guru Nanak's lips, responding with tender love and self-effacing deference for this divine presence which he in turn embodied. Throughout his works, there is an emphasis upon the greatness of God, upon divine self-revelation through the functioning of grace, upon the perils of human condition, and upon the paramount necessity of meditation on the divine Name. The dominant

spirit of Guru Arjan's hymns is remarkably exuberant.

On 4 November 1598, Emperor Akbar officially visited the Sikh court at Goindval. He listened to the devotional singing in the congregation and was greatly impressed by “the recitation of the Hindi verses that had been composed by Baba Nanak for expounding the knowledge of God” ([3], p. 21). He acknowledged Guru Arjan's “great store of spiritual love” and the selfless service of the Sikhs ([3], p. 19). At the Guru's instance, Akbar remitted the annual revenue of the peasants of the district who had been hit hard by the failure of the monsoon. He was genuinely impressed with what he saw at Goindval and gave his explicit approval to the work done by Guru Arjan. The emperor's nod to his philanthropic work put those Mughal officials on guard who were involved in the machinations of Prithi Chand and his followers. As a result of tax remission, Guru Arjan's popularity skyrocketed in the rural peasantry of the Punjab.

The liberal policy of Emperor Akbar may have sheltered Guru Arjan and his followers for a time, but it could not remove the nefarious designs of the Guru's enemies for good. The effect of his policy of religious pluralism did not last long after his death in October 1605. As a matter of fact, his liberal approach was much despised by many of his more aggressive coreligionists, particularly the protagonists of the Naqshbandi revivalist movement ([4], p. 150). In the volatile atmosphere of Prince Khusrau's rebellion, Guru Arjan was put to death with tortures on 30 May 1606 according to the Mongol tribal law of Yasa by the orders of Emperor Jahangir. Although the crowning cause of capital punishment was presented as Guru Arjan's alleged blessings to the rebel Prince Khusrau, there were other urgent religious, sociocultural, and economic factors that contributed in the final judgment of the absolute monarch. The Mughal administrators of Lahore who had been carefully monitoring the Sikh movement for a number of years found their opportunity to finally act against the Guru. They moved swiftly to eliminate Guru Arjan and cripple the rapidly growing Sikh movement. Through their machinations, they purposefully kept the Guru's execution from public view in an attempt



to absolve the state by subverting the understanding of the Sikh community.

In sum, Guru Arjan's death was surer in its connection to his life than it was in its connection to the preceding few days of Khusrav's rebellion. The end of his life was not really the end. His death empowered his followers to stand for the ideals of truth, justice, and fearlessness more boldly. A radical reshaping of the Sikh Panth took place after his martyrdom. His son and successor, Guru Hargobind, signaled the formal process when he traditionally donned two swords symbolizing the spiritual (*piri*) as well as the temporal (*miri*) investiture. He also built the Akal Takhat ("Throne of the Timeless One") facing the Darbar Sahib, representing the newly assumed role of temporal authority. Under his direct leadership, the Sikh Panth took up arms to protect itself from Mughal hostility. This new martial response was like "hedging the orchard of the Sikh faith with the hardy and thorny *kikar* tree" ([3], p. 298). It was meant to achieve a balance between temporal and spiritual concerns. Thus, Guru Arjan's martyrdom became the watershed in Sikh history, contributing basically to the growth of Sikh community self-consciousness, separatism, and militancy. Indeed, it became the single most decisive factor for the crystallization of the Sikh Panth.

## Cross-References

- [Guru](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Ramdas \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Singh D (2007) Guru Arjan Dev. Punjabi University, Patiala
2. Singh P (2000) The Guru Granth Sahib: canon, meaning and authority. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
3. Singh P (2006) Life and work of Guru Arjan. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. Singh D (2006) Sri Guru Arjan Dev. Sikh History Research Board, SGPC, Amritsar

## Art

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Art (Sikh)

- [Art \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Art (Sikhism)

Tavleen Kaur

University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[Architecture \(Sikh\)](#); [Art \(Sikh\)](#)

## Definition

An overview of Sikh art from the early eighteenth century to contemporary artists and their work.

## Introduction

Sikh art manifests in various different forms, scales, and mediums. Though there is little surviving evidence of art as it appeared in the Guru period (1469–1708), in the period after, art has become an integral tool used by the Sikhs to teach history lessons in local community schools and at *gurdwaras* (place of gathering and prayer). Reprints of Sikh art can be found in abundance in *gurdwaras* and homes of Sikhs in India and abroad. Since its earliest form in *Janamsakhi* (biographical) paintings, Sikh art has expanded to include a growing collection of realistic and abstract art in a number of mediums, including digital media.

## The Early Period

### Janamsakhis

Janamsakhi literature, written after the Gurus' lifespan, are biographical homages to their lives and lessons. Some Janamsakhis are accompanied with illustrations that compliment the text. The earliest example of this is the *Bala Janamsakhi*, dated 1658. Following this is the B-40 Janamsakhi, dating back to 1733 and named after its archival titling. The 57 illustrations in the B-40 Janamsakhi have a distinct character not found in later Sikh art. Captions to the paintings are part of the picture plane in these illustrations. The bright pigments appear in contrast to the flattened perspective of the figures. The historical significance of the figures is shown in their varying size. Guru Nanak is always the largest figure in the composition. The *sangat* (company of devotees) surrounding Guru Nanak is smaller in comparison. The paintings also include architectural and ecological details. They create a total environment showing both interior and exterior space and natural and created environments. All of these conventions of early Janamsakhi illustrations are exemplified in a B-40 painting titled "*Guru Nanak Mata Pita Naal*" (Guru Nanak with his Mother and Father) (see Fig. 1).

During his reign, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) commissioned painting of the wall surfaces of the nine-storey tower dedicated to Baba Atal Rai (1619–1627), son of Guru Har Gobind (1595–1644). The paintings inside this memorial gurdwara are detailed illustrations of the Janamsakhi literature. They also cover renowned leaders of the Sikhs from the eighteenth century. These frescoes are somewhat similar to the illustrations in the B-40 Janamsakhi; however, in their manifestation at Baba Atal Rai Gurdwara, they provide vignettes from the life history of the Gurus and are painted within frames of floral patterns. Like in the Janamsakhi illustrations, the ones at Baba Atal Rai use particular symbols to distinguish the Guru figure from others in the scene (see Fig. 2). In the frescoes at Baba Atal Rai Gurdwara, the Guru figure is shown with a halo of light signifying Divinity; other outward symbols of the



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 1** Guru Nanak Mata Pita Naal

Guru's status are his placement in the center of the composition, a meditation rosary either around his neck or in his hands, and attendants fanning over his head. There is text accompanying each vignette. Even though the text is self-sufficient in explaining history according to Janamsakhi literature, these paintings are in themselves instructional and do not necessarily require textual explanation. However, the combination of text and paintings makes the frescoes at Baba Atal Rai Gurdwara a textbook scrolled onto each of the floors of the tower.

## Art in Architecture

### Naqqashi

Painting wall and ceiling surfaces with patterns and figures can be viewed as a method to embellish plain space with artistic creativity, while at the same time adding a layer of aesthetics to the

**Art (Sikhism),****Fig. 2** Guru Nanak discussing the sacred thread

structure of a building. In some cases, frescoes appear to blur the boundary between structure and decoration and become one with the surface on which they are painted. Sometimes the stylistic nature of the frescoes also lends them an appearance of inlay marble work typically found on outer walls and floors of historic religious and courtly buildings (see Fig. 3).

Biographical records on *Naqqash* artists are available starting in the mid-to-late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At this time their work is featured prominently in *gurdwaras* and residences of the elite. The tradition of naqqashi, as any other highly skilled production, was usually practiced through the generations of a single family. One of the most recognized names in Sikh *naqqashi* is that of Bhai Gian Singh Naqqash (1883–1953). Bhai Gian Singh came from a lineage of *naqqashis*; his predecessors and contemporaries were artists like Sant Singh, Kehar Singh, Bishen Singh, Kishen Singh, Nihal Singh, and Jwala Singh. All of these men enjoyed royal patronage in Punjab under various *rajahs* of small kingdoms, as well as the privileged position of being commissioned by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The existing naqqashi at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, is the work of Bhai Gian Singh. Artists trained in the Kangra style of painting also contributed to decorating wall surfaces of *gurdwaras* in the

**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 3** A portal of the BediSamadhs in Una, Himachal Pradesh

Darbar Sahib complex, though there are few biographical details available on these artists. Vibrant, rich colors made with natural pigments adorn the plain surfaces of Darbar Sahib. The



shape of architectural feature in which they are painted gives the composition a frame; patterns are fit into these frames as puzzle pieces (see Fig. 4).



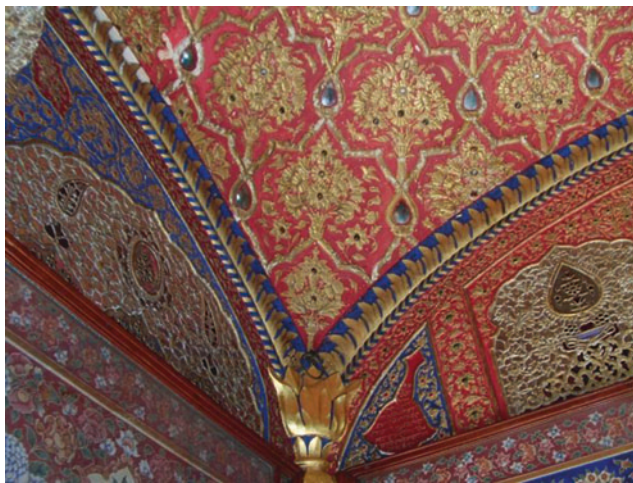
**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 4** Naqqashi at Darbar Sahib

### Gach

Ceilings of some buildings are adorned in *gach* work. Gach work is usually executed by making a paste with either limestone or gypsum mixed with water. The paste is then applied to the surface and carved into shape. Sometimes stonework is pressed into place in wet gach. When dry, the surface is painted with vibrant colors. It is common to find gach work on which hymns from *Gurbani* are stylistically inscribed into the design. As such, spreading the message of *Gurbani* is embodied in the structure of the gurdwara building. While sung *Kirtan* provides an auditory connection to *Gurbani*, its carving into the body of the building connects devotees on a visual level (see Fig. 5). Because gach is relatively easy to mold into shape, its surface is often found adorned with small pieces of mirror or colored glass. In this form, gach work is called *tukri* (lit. little piece). The effect of small pieces of glass inserted into painted gach is called *shish mahal* (palace of mirrors) – a decoration type also found in Mughal monuments (see Fig. 6).

### Jaratkari

*Jaratkari* consists of pieces of colorful stones tightly placed in slabs of marble. These decorated marble slabs can be found in many historic gurdwaras in India. Darbar Sahib has fine



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 5** Gach work on a gurdwara ceiling

**Art (Sikhism),****Fig. 6** Shish Mahal in Patiala, Punjab

A

*jaratkari* on its lower level. Much like in naqqashi and gach, floral and abstract patterns are also found in *jaratkari*. The *jaratkari* work at Darbar Sahib presents figural representations of animals, birds, and natural, organic forms (see Fig. 7). [For more information, see Balwinder Singh Dhillon's essay "Art Work in Historic Sikh Shrines: Need For Documentation and Conservation" in references]. Though the actual buildings are made with affordable, everyday architectural materials, like mud bricks, it is detailed handiwork like naqqashi, gach, and *jaratkari* that adds great value to Sikh buildings.

**Realistic Painting**

The largest and most widely produced genre of Sikh art is realistic painting. This particular style is most commonly used to depict renditions of the Gurus and famous Sikh personalities of the past. Art of this type is found in gurdwaras and homes of Sikhs. Works of twentieth-century artists like Sobha Singh (1901–1986) and Kirpal Singh (1923–1990) and contemporary artists like Devender Singh (b. 1947) and Jarnail Singh (b. 1956) have been widely reproduced as posters and calendar art, showcased in the Sikh Ajaib Ghars (museums) in India and the diaspora.

**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 7** Jaratkari at Darbar Sahib

Sobha Singh's paintings of Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh are among the artist's most recognized works (see Figs. 8, 9, and 10). The Guru figures are shown with a halo behind them, symbolic of their Divinity. Guru





**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 8** Guru Nanak

Nanak is portrayed as an elderly man with a white beard, wearing a *chola* (cloak) and *mala* (rosary), and extending his right hand out as if blessing the viewers of the painting. His painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur is similar to that of Guru Nanak's, except the Guru Tegh Bahadur is portrayed as a middle-aged figure, rather than an elderly one. Guru Gobind Singh, on the other hand, is shown in regalia, represented by a plume on his head, a turban with jewels, and fine clothing. Common understanding and knowledge of the Gurus' lives heavily inform such renditions. It is well known that Guru Gobind Singh led many battles during his lifetime. Both his martial identity and his spiritual life are rendered in Sobha Singh's painting of the Guru. Unlike Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur are not generally described in historiography as warrior figures. While the historical accuracy of such an understanding is difficult to confirm, artists like Sobha Singh choose a very particular way in which to depict the other Gurus. Guru Har Gobind, the



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 9** Guru Tegh Bahadur

sixth Guru, is portrayed very similar to Guru Gobind Singh. Because Guru Har Gobind established the theory of dual swords, *miri-piri*, representing the necessity for spiritual and temporal balance, he is shown carrying two swords and is also portrayed in kingly regalia.

In addition to the paintings of Gurus, some artists reproduced moments from Sikh history on canvas. Significant religious and political figures from Sikh history have provided inspiration to many artists. Self-taught artist Kirpal Singh's (1923–1990) paintings, for example, depict a pictorial narrative of the Sikh *ardas* (prayer). *Ardas* is said before the start of any religious or sociopolitical affair, after every congregational meeting among Sikhs, and after recitation of Gurbani in the privacy of the home. It captures Sikh history in each of its paragraphs, starting with the Gurus; ardaas then commemorates *Panj Pyare* (the first five Sikhs to be baptized by Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur in 1699), *Chaar Sahibzadey* (the four sons of Guru Gobind



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 10** Guru Gobind Singh

Singh), *Chaali Mukte* (40 liberated ones; it is in reference to Sikhs who fought in battle under the leadership of Mata Bhaag Kaur), and all other *shaheeds* (martyrs) from Sikh history. In the text of *ardas*, devotees also ask for the blessing of looking after Sikh gurdwaras and other sites associated with the Gurus. *Ardas* concludes with the congregation wishing well of all – *Sarbat da Bhalla*. As such, *ardas* is an integral part of everyday Sikh life and is recited three to five times a day in *gurdwaras*. Because of its importance in Sikh praxis, artists like Kirpal Singh translate its significance from spoken word to painted form. The *ardas*-inspired paintings of Kirpal Singh are extremely vivid; they allow viewers to step into Sikh history and experience it through visuals. In a way, these paintings serve the same purpose as stained glass in gothic cathedrals – they are meant to be inspiring and motivating and are also didactic.

Like Sobha Singh's paintings of the Gurus, Kirpal Singh's are also realistic. However, they

also include a context for the painting, rather than a blank background, as found in the former's work. The *ardas* paintings are loaded with narrative; each part of the paintings is carefully articulated and shows numerous figures occupying the same plane. Kirpal Singh also provides architectural detail within the paintings. Oftentimes, the painting scene is placed within an architectural frame of doorways, a courtyard, or before a fort. The artist also makes use of conventions like three-dimensionality, perspective, shadow, and depth. His paintings of battle scenes most clearly demonstrate the use of these conventions. His painting of Sikhs rescuing abducted women in the Battle of Panipat is an example of the language of the artist's work (see Fig. 11). The intensity of the historic moment is clearly visible through the fiery sky; the anger of Sikhs over abduction of innocent women can be read through their stiff figuration, signaling a challenge to fight the enemy.

Another example of Kirpal Singh's evocative canvases is the painting of Sikh women who were forced to wear limbs of their children around their necks as wreaths (see Fig. 12). Such atrocities took place under the order by Mir Mannu, the erstwhile governor of Lahore, who challenged Sikhs to either convert to Islam or be gruesomely killed and watch their loved ones be killed before them. This particular mid-eighteenth-century episode from Sikh history is remembered in *ardas*. The painting shows graphic details of the barbaric killing of children and the hardships their mothers faced. The painting captures the urgency of the moment. Even the dried up, dead tree to the right of the canvas speaks of the horror of the time depicted in the painting.

Realistic paintings of the Gurus, historic Sikh figures, and moments from the Sikh past have become an important part of the Sikh psyche in the contemporary world. Hardly any gurdwara is devoid of reproductions of these paintings. Some gurdwara committees in the diaspora have commissioned artists like Devender Singh (b. 1947) and Jarnail Singh (b. 1956, son of artist Kirpal Singh) to produce large canvases of realistic painting to create *Ajaib Ghars* (museums) at their respective gurdwaras. Such paintings are



**Art (Sikhism),**  
**Fig. 11** Battle of Panipat



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 12** Sikhs in Mir Mannu's jail

referenced when Sikh history is being taught at gurdwara schools in India and the diaspora. While there is written, textual historiography on the Sikh past, realistic paintings of the material found in those books go hand in hand with the Sikh narrative described in written and oral history. Sikh realistic painting, oral history, and written history are inseparable.

### **Nontraditional Sikh-Themed Painting**

While Sikh Gurus and other prominent historical figures have provided inspiration for the artists discussed above, some have also expressed the message of the Gurus, *Gurbani*, in artistic form. Devender Singh is renowned both for his realistic painting and his abstract works, which draw on

**Art (Sikhism),**  
**Fig. 13** Saavan



A

Gurbani for thematic reference. His series of paintings titled *Bara Maha* (12 months) depict many layers of emotions and meanings. The title comes from a composition in Gurbani written by Guru Nanak; the Guru writes a hymn for each of the 12 months of the Sikh calendar. Paralleling seasonal changes to emotional changes in an individual's mind, the *Bara Maha* Gurbani contains themes of longing, separation from, and union with the Divine. Devender Singh takes the poetic verses of the *Bara Maha* composition as inspiration and translates the feeling of the verses into paintings. For example, the verse for Savan, a month of the rainy season, is about an individual expressing the joy of the season but also reflecting on emotional pain of being away from the Divine (i.e., the idea of feeling disconnected to Divinity due to one's own actions). The verse expresses emotions of sorrow and loneliness. It mentions the soul's intense desire to be with its Creator, especially since the lightning and thunder of Savan are frightening (i.e., the consequences of one's own actions are realized to be terrifying). The Guru writes from the perspective of the scared and suffering soul and expresses that no material comforts can alleviate the pain of separation from the Divine. (This verse can be found on page 1108 of Guru Granth Sahib.)

With such rich and poetic imagery to work with, the product of Devender Singh's painting of Savan is an image of a lonely woman. She is the central focus of the painting (see Fig. 13). She is sitting under rainy skies with her hand on her cheek as if in deep introspection. The right half of the image shows a vibrant tree blossoming from the refreshing rain. The female figure is detached from the natural beauty that comes from Savan. The ambiguous figure represents perfectly the imagery of the Savan hymn. The artist includes one line of the hymn at the bottom right of the painting as a textual marker that accompanies the scene.

Another example of the message from *Bara Maha* Gurbani and its translation into painted form by Devender Singh is the artist's rendition of Pokh, one of the winter months. The Gurbani verse for Pokh expresses the harsh weather conditions of winter, but juxtaposes them with the idea of Divine presence in all beings in spite of overwinter. The Pokh painting uses a soft-color palette of pinks and blues to depict winter, but the energy of the painting comes through the darker shades used to paint the female figure and the organic forms surrounding her (see Fig. 14). The artist seems to take the idea of total Divine presence and represents it by connecting all the

**Art (Sikhism),**  
**Fig. 14** Pokh



sections of the painting to the central female figure, whose clothes are a mix of light and dark shades. These colors are used in all other parts of the canvas as well. Devender Singh's paintings remind one of Cubist art in that multiple perspectives appear to be presented in one plane. He organizes patches of color on his canvases so as to give structure to what are otherwise very fluid scenes with their objects and subjects blending into one another.

Painting was one arena of the arts that underwent cultural transformation during colonial India. An effect of this transformation was widening of the types of royal patronage. Sher Singh (1807–1843), son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, especially commissioned August Schoefft, a Viennese artist to paint a scene of the Maharaja at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Schoefft painted the *Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Darbar Sahib* in 1841 (see Fig. 15). Not having personally attended the *darbar* (court) of the Maharaja, Schoefft relied on his stay in the Sikh Empire and his own imagination to depict a royal scene situated in Amritsar. The large canvas (measuring nearly 53 in. by 42 in.) captures all the highlights of the Darbar Sahib complex. It even includes structures like the one on the left, a palace, which no longer survives (for more information about the painting,

see [www.sikhmuseum.com](http://www.sikhmuseum.com)). In this manner, Schoefft's painting is a historical record of the city of Amritsar as well. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Darbar Sahib* is instantly decipherable from other Sikh art since it has characteristics of Company painting of colonial India.

Two other colonial-influence paintings of royal patronage are that of Maharani Jind Kaur (1817–1863) and Maharaja Duleep Singh (1838–1893), the wife and son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, respectively. At the time of the latter's passing, Duleep Singh was still a minor. Therefore, Jind Kaur acted as the regent of the Sikh Kingdom for her son. Towards the end of her life, British painter George Richmond created a portrait of the Maharani, depicting her in full royal splendor from rich fabrics to precious jewels (see Fig. 16). This portraiture style became widely adapted by nineteenth-century rulers of princely states in and around Punjab. Another example of Sikh subjects painted in Western painting is the full-length portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh painted in 1854 by Franz Xavier Winterhalter (see Fig. 17). Duleep is shown standing in contrapposto before a naturalistic background. He exhibits all the outward symbols of royalty – a turban adorned with a plume and jewels, a sword, and fine clothing and directly





**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 15** “Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Darbar Sahib” by August Schoefft



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 16** “Maharani Jind Kaur” by George Richmond

returns the spectators’ gaze. This portrait may represent the lavish lifestyle of Duleep Singh; in reality, however, his lifestyle was very tumultuous. (For more discussion on the painting, see pages 48–56 of Brian Keith Axel’s book, *The Nation’s Tortured Body*, listed in References).

In 2009, US-based artist Manu Saluja reproduced Winterhalter’s painting, along with a similarly composed painting of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (see Figs. 18 and 19). The twin paintings narrate the rise and ultimate dissolution of the Sikh Kingdom. Maharaja Ranjit Singh consolidated the Sikh Empire in his reign from 1801 until 1839. After being exiled to England, his son, Duleep Singh, spent most of his life living as a colonial subject from whom his kingdom had been stolen. The outward garb of Duleep Singh, especially the “miniature” of Queen Victoria that he is shown wearing around his neck, all phrase his body as subject to the Crown (taken from Brian K. Axel’s book, pages 54–56). In contrast, Saluja’s portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh projects the ruler’s projects his authority from the way he is seated. The Maharaja seems much more



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 17** “Duleep Singh” by Franz Xavier Winterhalter



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 18** “Maharaja Duleep Singh” by Manu Saluja

assertive than his son who appears to be retreating back into the ambiguous background. Placed side by side, the paintings of these two subjects narrate contrasting stories of their history. What binds them, however, is the way in which they are painted using similar motifs.

Even though oil on canvas seems to dominate Sikh art of the past and present, there are some examples of recent works executed in a simpler medium of pen and ink on paper. Gagandeep Singh (b. 1975), a contemporary Indian artist, creates what he describes as artistic rendering of his understanding of Sikh philosophy and heritage. In his drawing of the Darbar Sahib complex in Amritsar, the artist frames the drawing in the outline of a dome, articulated in the way that the domes on the building actually look like (see Fig. 20). He places vignettes of the buildings in and around the complex within the perimeter of

the dome frame. The axial focus is on Darbar Sahib, sitting amidst a sharply defined *sarovar* (pool of water), which is aligned with the *darshandeori* (entrance portal) and Akal Takht. A hand holding a *khanda* (double-edged sword, symbolic of Sikh sovereignty) at the very top of the dome frame seals the axuality. Many artists choose to paint, sketch, or draw the Darbar Sahib complex due to its historic and contemporary significance in the Sikh world. While others choose to render it as vividly as it actually is, Gagandeep Singh highlights its splendor using pen and ink.

## Recent Events and Art

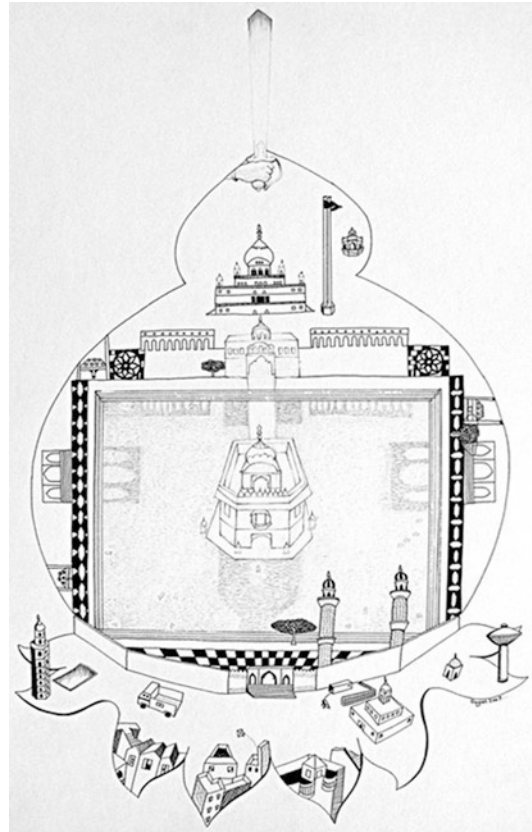
Undoubtedly, one of the most significant moments of recent Sikh history is the Indian





**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 19** “Maharaja Ranjit Singh, by Manu Saluja

Government-led attack on Darbar Sahib, Akal Takht, and surrounding sites in Amritsar and other areas in Punjab. “Operation Blue Star” resulted in the systematic killing of thousands of pilgrims that were visiting the Darbar Sahib complex in the early days of June 1984. Pilgrims had come to attend the martyrdom commemoration of Guru Arjan Dev. The attack on Amritsar was deliberately organized so that it coincided with this commemoration because it attracted a larger number of attendees than on regular days. In an attempt to dislodge a handful of political and armed Sikhs who had occupied Darbar Sahib, army troops equipped with heavy artillery and tanks marched into the complex and open fired on all. According to eyewitness reports, over 10,000 attendees and 1,300 workers of the complex were detained inside and unable to leave due to armed forces having taken over the area (statistics taken from page 271 of Jaskaran



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 20** “Darbar Sahib” by Gagandeep Singh

Kaur Grewal’s “A Judicial Blackout: Judicial Impunity for Disappearances in Punjab, India.” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* (2002), <http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/hrj/iss15/kaur.shtml#fn1>).

A second wave of violence came in November of the same year. Out of retaliation, Indira Gandhi, the erstwhile prime minister who sanctioned the attacks, was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31. For the next 10 days, the government-aided violence that ensued left another 3,000 people dead and 50,000 homeless in just New Delhi (taken from Jaskaran Kaur Grewal’s report). The worldwide Sikh community continues to struggle the fight against impunity from these two violent episodes. The attacks on Darbar Sahib and Akal Takht are viewed as direct attacks on Sikh sovereignty itself. Though NGOs are working to achieve justice from the legal





**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 21** “1984” by ArpanaCaur

world in post-1984 India, artists like the Arpana Caur (b. 1954) and the Singh Twins (b. 1966) have coped with the trauma in their own ways and have helped others cope with it as well.

Arpana Caur depicts the trauma of loss, pain, and destruction from violence in several paintings. In one specifically titled “1984,” the artist depicts a grieving woman mourning at the site of a Sikh’s decapitated head (see Fig. 21). His body is not part of the picture plane, but those that know of the violence from 1984 know well what happened to it – many Sikh men were dragged out of their homes and burnt alive with rubber tires. Sikh women were raped; it is possible that the female figure in this painting represents one such woman who was a victim on three levels – of being raped; of witnessing the gruesome death of her father, husband, or son; and of being viewed in this vulnerable position. The male figure in the back seems to gaze in the distance and appears aloof from the scene in the foreground. Both the figures’ postures further contribute to the melancholia of the scene. The deep yellow and brown tones of the

painting surrounding the female figure and the head signify the destruction of entire neighborhoods being set ablaze. Much like Kirpal Singh’s historical paintings that move the viewers to empathize with the pain and trauma of the scene, Caur’s work pushes its viewers to engage with the helplessness and agony of the figures, even if the spectators are completely unfamiliar with what “1984” refers to.

British artists Amrit and Rabindra Singh are well-known contemporary artists. The twin women have a distinguished, hybrid style. At first glance, their work seems like a combination of Mughal miniatures, Pahari painting, and Janamsakhi illustrations. At the same time, the Singh Twins employ Western painting traditions of perspective and depth in the spatial configuration of their work. The Singh Twins describe their distinct style as “past-Modern,” since they are aware of artistic notions of modernist and post-modern painting, but also derive inspiration from much older Eastern painting traditions (taken from page 21 of *Twin Perspectives*, listed in References). The two artists have been widely recognized in the Sikh community; this was especially true after they painted *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (alternately titled *Storming of “The Golden Temple”*) in 1998 (see Fig. 22). This work is the artists’ response to Operation Blue Star and the November 1984 pogroms. The painting shows bloodshed, terror, and violence. It depicts the central building of the complex, Darbar Sahib, surrounded by Akal Takht, other buildings of the complex, and a throng of people all around the perimeter of the central building. Even though the main subject of the painting is 1984, it positions historic individuals that came before and others that came after 1984 in the same picture plane. The painting shows the mid-eighteenth-century Sikh warrior, Baba Deep Singh. It also shows twentieth-century politicians depicted as what the artists call a “multiheaded demon.” This figure is comprised of Winston Churchill, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, and Bill Clinton. The painting tells a narrative of the violence of 1984, as well as of the capacity of evil modern statehood has reached. In this way, painting’s flattened birds-eye view collapses space and time.



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 22** “Storming of ‘The Golden Temple’” by the Singh Twins

## Digital Art

Sikh art created by the current generation takes inspiration from artists like Sobha Singh and Devender Singh, as well as from non-Sikh sources. While portraiture is still common among contemporary artists, the translation of traditional painting into digitally rendered work has yielded fascinating results. The work of Kanwar Singh is a case in point. Like the artists a generation before him, Kanwar Singh derives subject matter from Sikh history. He uses themes and moments from Sikh history and looks at precedent of artists like Sobha Singh and Devender Singh. Additionally, his formal training in Fine Arts and familiarity with works of Caravaggio and Waterhouse are factors that further give his work a signature style (taken from the artist’s website, [www.artofpunjab.com](http://www.artofpunjab.com)). The artist creates his work primarily through digital media. Despite this nontraditional medium for a traditional painting style of Sikh art, Kanwar Singh’s work does not challenge the work of his predecessors.

Rather, because of the various different types of artistic influences that Kanwar Singh employs in his work, his digital paintings add greater diversity to the larger genre of Sikh art.

His work titled “Guru Arjan Dev – Birth of the Adi Granth” shows the process of the creation of the first version of what later became Guru Granth Sahib. In the depicted scene, Guru Arjan Dev is shown reciting *Gurbani*. Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of the Guru, is seen transcribing the *Gurbani* by hand. Darbar Sahib, a building project of Guru Arjan Dev and the site of the installation of the Adi Granth in 1604, can be seen as the central focus in the background. The *sarovar* (pool) in which Darbar Sahib sits is a large component of the scene. Kanwar Singh adheres to chronological accuracy in painting, for he shows the sixteenth-century depiction of the Darbar Sahib – a brick structure with some marble *jaratkari* on its outer walls. The gilded Darbar Sahib (hence, “Golden Temple”) is a product of the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh from the early nineteenth century. The artist shows Darbar Sahib as it may have appeared in its pre-gold plating era. Digital rendering technology allows the artist to play with light and shadow and fill in each square inch of the composition with fine detail. In this way, Kanwar Singh’s art provides a fine balance of traditional Sikh figural painting and portraiture coupled with conventions of art typically used in Western painting.

## Sculpture

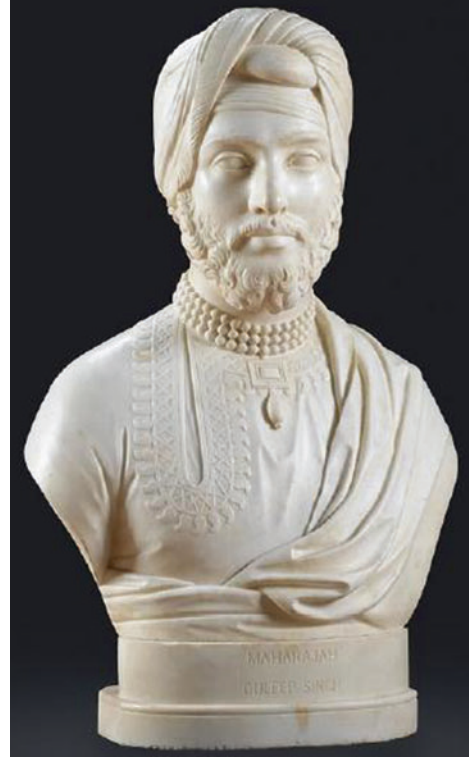
Though popular now, Sikh sculpture was not always a popular medium. In the last several decades, some gurdwaras in Punjab have added sculptures of historical Sikh figures on their property grounds as memorials. One of the most thorough memorial sculpture parks is located in Mehtiana Sahib Gurdwara in District Ludhiana (see Fig. 23). The *gurdwara* features different stations with sculptures representing Sikh martial, political, and martyrdom history, most of which is covered in the *ardas*. The artists, Tara Singh and his son Parvinder Singh, started creating the sculpture park out of iron, cement, and paint in



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 23** “Mai Bhao in battle,” sculpture at Mehtiana Sahib Gurdwara near Ludhiana

the 1980s. It continues to grow to the present day with other artists’ contribution. The purpose of the sculpture park is not to provide visual enjoyment. The different stations of sculptures are extremely graphic in how they depict gruesome martyrdom of Sikhs. Much like the historical paintings of Kirpal Singh, the sculpture park at Mehtiana Sahib serves more of a didactic purpose over aesthetic enjoyment. In their vernacular form, these iconic works are the most well-known example of Sikh sculpture.

Like Company painting, marble sculptures are not common in traditional Sikh art. However, an exemplary piece of this kind was auctioned at Bonhams auction house in 2007. The piece, a marble bust of Maharaja Duleep Singh, was sculpted by the Welsh sculptor, John Gibson (see Fig. 24). The last of the Sikh rulers, Duleep Singh was the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Rani Jindan. Duleep Singh’s complicated, fascinating, and sorrowful life story adds a great amount of meaning to the bust. According to Bonham,



**Art (Sikhism), Fig. 24** “Maharaja Duleep Singh” sculpted by John Gibson

a private art collector purchased the bust for £1.7 million.

Historical figures from the Sikh past continue to dominate contemporary Sikh sculpture. One of the most iconic projects of Sikh sculpture in public space has been the installation of sculpture among a landscape architecture project led by artist and architect Sonia Dhami. The project was built to commemorate the tercentenary of Khalsa in 1999. It is an outdoor museum of sort, for it uses statues, aesthetically designed information panels, and engraved rocks as the major objects. A wall made to resemble boundary walls of historic Sikh forts goes around the site. Various sculpture stations, for example, like the one depicting the Panj Pyare, bind the site and provide a historical narrative. Artist Jarnail Singh, son of Kirpal Singh, was one of the consultants for the project.



## Exhibitions of Sikh Art

In the last couple decades, collectors of Sikh art have gathered an impressive amount of Sikh paintings and artifacts. In 1999, on the tercentenary of Khalsa, an exhibit titled “Arts of the Sikh Kingdom” was installed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in the United Kingdom. Following that, “The Sikh Heritage Gallery” was installed in 2004 as a permanent exhibition at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. Shortly thereafter, an exhibit of miniature paintings titled “I See No Stranger: Early Sikh Art and Devotion” was exhibited at the Rubin Museum in New York City. Between 2010 and 2011, the United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association has organized two impressive exhibits as well. The first was their contribution to Sikh artifacts to “Maharajas: The Splendour of India’s Royal Courts,” which has been on display in London, Toronto, and San Francisco. In 2011 the UKPHA organized “GT 1588,” an interactive exhibit that featured rare art and architectural artifacts and musical and martial heritage of Sikhs.

## Conclusion

Since the Janamsakhi illustrations, Sikh art has grown through a number media. Aesthetic embellishment of architectural space with different painting techniques is a long-established tradition in Sikh art, especially at large centers of Sikhi, like Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. The largest body of Sikh art is in the form of realistic figural painting of artists’ renditions of Sikh Gurus and prominent historical figures. However, this expansive body of work does not only appear in oil paint on canvas. It includes contemporary artists’ use of other materials like digital media and individualized style through simple materials like pen and ink on paper.

Some artists have used their creativity to respond to recent Sikh history and the episodes of violence and trauma in the social, political, and religious spheres in which Sikhs live. These types

of emotionally charged works add a new dimension to Sikh art in that they are not only realistic, figural representations of Sikh Gurus. Such figural painting, however, has inspired contemporary artists to use the medium of sculpture to depict Sikh history. The type of sculptural Sikh art ranges from entirely handmade sculptures reflecting local, vernacular training and also large-scale works designed digitally. All of these types of the arts of Sikhs have been attracting an international market in the last couple decades, as museums in the diaspora have been able to host traveling and permanent exhibitions of Sikh artistic heritage. This essay is a brief overview of select past and contemporary artists and their work ranging across various mediums.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Art \(Sikh\)](#)
- ▶ [Historical Sources \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Sikh Studies](#)
- ▶ [Sikhi](#)

## References

1. Aijazuddin FS (1977) Pahari paintings and Sikh portraits in the Lahore museum. Sotheby Parke Bernet, London
2. Aijazuddin FS (1981) Honored images – the use of portraiture in Sikh diplomacy. *Marg* 34(1):89–94, 138
3. Anand MR (1977) Painting and prayer: a note on hieratic pictorial art under the Sikhs. *Marg* 30(3):42–45
4. Anand MR (1954) Painting under the Sikhs. *Marg* 7(2):23–31
5. Anand MR (1957) Specimens of paintings under the Sikhs. *Marg* 10(2):37–44
6. Arshi PS (1989) The Golden temple: history, art, and architecture. Harman Publishing House, New Delhi
7. Axel BK (2001) The nation’s tortured body. Violence, representation, and the formation of a Sikh Diaspora. Duke University Press, Durham
8. Brown K (1999) Sikh art and literature. Routledge, London
9. Deol JS (2003) Illustrations and illumination in Sikh scriptural manuscripts. *Marg* 54(4):30–47

10. Dhillon BS (2007) Art work in historic Sikh shrines: need for documentation and conservation. Paper presented at the International CIPA Symposium, Athens, Greece, 1 June 2007
11. Goswamy BN (1999) Painters at the Sikh court: a study based on twenty documents. Aryan Books, New Delhi
12. Goswamy BN (2000) Piety and Splendour: Sikh heritage in art. National Museum, New Delhi
13. Goswamy BN, Smith C (2006) I see no stranger. Early Sikh art and devotion. Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad
14. Hans S (1987) B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak paintings. Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar
15. Kang K (1988) Art and architecture of Punjab. In: Singh M (ed) History and culture of Panjab. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp 271–279
16. Kang K (1981) Wall painting under the Sikhs. In: Anand MR (ed) Maharaja Ranjit Singh as patron of the arts. Marg Publications, Bombay, pp 129–137
17. Kaur M (1987) Painter of the divine, Sobha Singh. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
18. Kessar U (2003) Twentieth-century Sikh painting: the presence of the past. *Marg* 54(4):118–133
19. Madra AS, Singh P (eds) (2011) The Golden temple of Amritsar. Reflections of the Past (1808–1959). Kashi House, London
20. McLeod WH (1991) Popular Sikh art. Oxford University Press, Delhi
21. Murphy A (2005) Materializing Sikh pasts. *Sikh Form* 1(2):175–200
22. Singh A, Singh R (2002) Past modern: paintings by the Singh twins. National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
23. Singh A, Singh R, Spalding J, Pal R, Swallo D (2000) Twin perspectives. Twin Studio, Liverpool
24. Singh A, Singh R (2007) Sikhism and the visual arts. In: Ballantyne T (ed) Textures of the Sikh past. New historical perspectives. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 312–326
25. Singh DJ (2002) The art of Arpana Caur. Lustre Press, New Delhi
26. Singh D (1987) The Sikh art and architecture. Panjab University Press, Chandigarh
27. Singh K (ed) (2003) New insights into Sikh art. Marg Publications, Mumbai
28. Stronge S (ed) (1999) The arts of the Sikh kingdoms. Weatherhill, New York

---

## Ashta Samskara

### ► Samskara (Sikhism)

---

## Atma

### ► Mind (Sikhism)

---

## Aum

### ► Meditation (Sikhism)

---

## Authority (Sikhism)

Harpreet Singh

Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

## Definition

There have been several shifts throughout Sikh history in regards to persons and/or institutions that have a position to control or compel obedience from Sikh devotees. The living Gurus as well as the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth have been centers of authority, as have the institutions like Gurdwaras, Takhts, sangat, and the Khalsa.

## The Personal Guru and the Sangat

Historically, authority in Sikh life has been concentrated in the institution of the Gurū. Sikhī was founded by Gurū Nānak (1469–1539) in the Punjāb and was shaped by his nine successors, who also bear the appellation of “*Gurū*” – a prophet sent by God to enter the currents of history and catalyze change in the world. Unlike a Semitic prophet (*rasūl*), as in Islam, who revalidates God’s original message first communicated by Prophet Abraham (*Qur’ān* 3:81, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 22:78), the *Gurū* in *Sikhī* brings a radically new value system to humanity,

challenging and then replacing existing ideals. Both God and its *shabad* (revelation that was eventually textualized in the form of the *Guru Granth Sahib*) are also referred to as “Gurū” in the Sikh scriptural tradition. [3] The ten Sikh Gurūs, who led the Sikh community, claim that the *shabad* is their ultimate, infallible guide. Throughout Sikh history, one also finds that the institution of *saṅgat* (Sikh congregation) has played an important role and was frequently used by Sikh Gurūs as an extension of their own authority. In fact, in some instances, the Sikh Gurūs themselves submitted to the supremacy of the *saṅgat*, a significant step that served as a precursor to the authority that was eventually vested in the institution of the Gurū Khālsā Panth, the corporate body of initiated Sikhs. The Panth itself is represented by a temporary, decentralized council of *pañj pyare*, the “five beloved ones,” who are selected from within a congregation for a specific purpose or occasion. [1, 5]

### The Khalsa and the Evolution of the System of Authority

Gurū Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the last personal Gurū, not choosing a human successor transferred his own authority to the dual agency of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, the Sikh scripture, and to the Gurū Khālsā Panth. The *Granth* was to be the light of the Gurū and the Panth—the way. These two entities jointly came to constitute the Gurū in *Sikhī*. The first half of this condominium, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is much more than a mere scripture. As the revealed word of God, set to a formal system of classical music codified by the Gurūs, it takes center-stage in Sikh life. The revelation is internalized with the aid of music and daily recitation to bring the Sikh’s actions in harmony with Sikh teachings. The *Panth*, on the other hand, is the political body of Sikhs who have specifically committed to the Sikh way of life. Its membership is open to all people, regardless of their gender, class, or caste. [4, 6]

During the eighteenth century, in the period after Gurū Gobind Singh, the *Khālsā Panth* found itself without a specific mechanism to exercise its authority. While a mechanism existed on a local level through the institution of the *pañj pyare* mentioned above, something was needed to build consensus within the *Panth* at large. This led to the development of the institution of *Sarbatt Khālsā*, an open and democratic council of Sikhs summoned to take decisions on pressing issues faced by the Sikh community. The *Sarbatt Khālsā* met at the *Akāl Takht* in Amritsar, and has been described in many colonial accounts. For instance, according to a letter by George Forster’s from the 1780s: “No honorary or titular distinction is conferred on any member of the state. . . An equality of rank is maintained in civil society, which no class of men, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when general councils of the nation were convened. . . every member had the privilege of delivering his opinion; and the majority, it is said, decided the subject in debate”. [2] The *Sarbatt Khālsā* councils were convened in the presence of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, maintaining the joint authority of the Gurū, together, in the form of the *Granth* and the Panth. The resolution achieved by this gathering of Sikhs is known as *gurmattā* (the resolution of the Gurū). No *Sarbatt Khālsā* councils were held during the colonial period. In postcolonial India, however, a *Sarbatt Khālsā* was called at the *Akāl Takht* in 1986 to address the political and human rights issues facing the Sikh community.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- ▶ [Guru](#)
- ▶ [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- ▶ [Khalsa](#)
- ▶ [Mīrī Pīrī](#)
- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Takhts](#)



## References

1. Cole WO (1982) *The Guru in Sikhism*. Darton, Longman & Todd, London
2. Forster G (1798) *A journey from Bengal to England: through the northern part of India, Kashmire, Afghanistan, and Persia, and into Russia, by the Caspian-Sea*. R. Faulder, London
3. Gurū Granth Sāhib, SGPC, Amritsar
4. Mahboob HS (2000) *Sehije Racio Khalsa* [in Panjabi]. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
5. Singh K (1991) *Guru Nanak's life and thought*, 1st edn. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
6. Singh K (2001) *Pārāsarapraśna: an enquiry into the genesis and unique character of the order of the Khalsa with an exposition of the Sikh tenets*, 3rd edn. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

---

## Autonomy for Punjab

► [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

# B

---

## Banda Bahadur

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Epithet given to an ascetic yogi who was born with the name Lachhman Dev in October 1670 in Kashmir. Upon becoming an ascetic Lachhman took the name Madho Das. A meeting with the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh in 1708 led Madho Das to joining the Khalsa. Thereafter, he was known as Banda Singh – commonly thought to refer to the fact that he had become the man, or *banda* of Guru Gobind Singh. He led an insurrection against the Mughal governors of Lahore which was eventually suppressed and led to waves of violence against Sikhs throughout Mughal territories.

### Banda Bahadur: Insurrection of the Khalsa

The man who is remembered historically by the name Banda Bahadur was born Lachhman Dev (1670–1716) in the Punchh district of Kashmir. He was the son of a plowman named Ram Dev who hailed from the Sodhi subcaste, although there is some disagreement as to whether he hailed from

a Brahman or Rajput family. At the age of 15, Lachhman Dev would leave home in order to become an ascetic. He initially became the disciple of a recluse known as Janaki Das. After becoming a *bairagi* under the discipleship of another ascetic, named Bairagi Ram Das, he became known as Madho Das at the shrine of Ram Thamman near Kasur in Punjab. This shrine gave Banda Bahadur his first, albeit distant, connection to the Sikh tradition as the *sadhu* (ascetic) known as Ram Thamman was the son of Guru Nanak's maternal aunt. Madho Das continued to wander the countryside; he spent some time near the city of Nashik in the northwestern region of modern day Maharashtra where he learnt *yoga* from a teacher named Aughar Nath. Upon the death of his teacher, Madho Das moved to Nander in order to establish his own monastery, or *math*. [3, 4, 6, 9]

Madho Das would eventually meet with the tenth Sikh guru, Gobind Singh, who had initially set out to meet Aurangzeb with the idea of seeking redress against the *faujdar* of Sirhind, Wazir Khan's excesses. On his way to Deccan, he learned that Aurangzeb had died in February 1707 and was succeeded by his son Prince Muazzam, who took the title Bahadur Shah. The Guru met Bahadur Shah in August 1707. The meeting was a cordial one, raising hopes that the issue of Wazir Khan could be settled. But for almost a year, the Emperor dithered and gave no firm reply one way or another partly because of the weakened political position of the Mughal Empire. So when Bahadur Shah left Agra for Deccan, the Guru and his army remained

close to the imperial camp in the hope of getting a decision. [7]

By the early summer of 1708, as the Guru had still not received any firm reply from the Emperor, he decided to take a different course and parted company with Bahadur Shah and proceeded towards the city of Nander. The Guru set up his camp at Nander, a city which was bustling with prominent Hindu sects, and began to preach the message of Guru Nanak. On one occasion there was an armed conflict between the followers of then prominent bairagi ascetic named Madho Das (who was rumored to possess occult powers) and members of the Guru's own Khalsa militia. The bairagi's disciples were worsted in this altercation and his own encounter with the Guru resulted in his submission to Guru Gobind Singh's authority, an act which endeared him to the Guru and resulted in his being renamed as Banda. [2, 6, 9]

During these months in Nander, the Guru's regular sermons began to attract many people. Among these was an Afghan named Jamshed Khan who had been hired by Wazir Khan to assassinate the Guru. In early October 1708, the assassin found the right opportunity when Guru Gobind Singh had retired to his apartment after conducting an evening service. Jamshed Khan attacked and badly wounded the Guru. The stab wounds were dressed but the Guru realized that he had been mortally wounded. Summoning his closest Sikhs around him he declared the line of living Gurus to be closed. Then, taking a coconut and 5 *paisa* (coins) he prostrated himself before the *Adi Granth* declared that it was now to be regarded as the Guru of the Sikhs – the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Final authority was now jointly conferred on the text (*Guru Granth*) and the institution of the Khalsa (*Guru Panth*). These twin institutions – *Guru Granth* and *Guru Panth* – were invested with sovereign authority. [7] This was not so much a break with convention as a logical development from Guru Nanak's decision to nominate a disciple as Guru during his lifetime. In the last days of his life, the Guru gave some final instructions to his Sikhs. These included the deputation of Banda Bahadur to travel to Punjab and raise an

army to bring Wazir Khan to justice. On 18 October 1708, Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last and died at the age of 42. [3, 8, 9]

Shortly after Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708, Banda left for Punjab accompanied by some of the Guru's old followers. He carried with him *hukamnamas* issued by the Guru exhorting the Sikhs to support him. For almost a year, Banda moved slowly from town to town collecting soldiers and materials for a military campaign. In November 1709, he began attacking the towns of Samana, Sirhind, Hissar, and Saharanpur, all of which were in some way connected to the deaths of the Sikh Gurus or the sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Wazir Khan was caught and put to death along with many others. By 1710, Banda had conquered large parts of the Punjab. These uprisings were considered serious enough to warrant Bahadur Shah's personal involvement in subduing them. In 1711, Banda occupied the imperial fort of Mukhlispur and renamed it Lohgarh. It is here that he struck a new coin in the name of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak to formally declare the beginning of sovereign Sikh rule and in effect Banda was exercising political power on behalf of the Guru and the Khalsa. Both of these actions were received with suspicion by some among the Khalsa as they were thought to be against the principles for which the Khalsa was created. [1, 4, 6]

For another four years, Banda continued to evade the Mughals until Farrukh Siyar succeeded Bahadur Shah as Emperor in February 1713. Farrukh Siyyar ordered the wholesale extermination of the Sikhs, appointing Abdus Samad Khan as governor of Lahore. Abdus Samad Khan made life much more difficult for Banda Bahadur who nevertheless continued to evade capture. But by 1714, serious differences had arisen within the Sikh camp, owing partly to excesses committed by Banda's troops during their campaign of retribution against the Mughals and partly to Banda's deviation from key principles of the Khalsa code of conduct. This in turn led to the formation of two different Khalsa factions – the *Bandai Khalsa*, who were loyal to Banda, versus the *Tat Khalsa* led by close associates of the tenth Guru and his

wife Mata Sundari who remained loyal to the original Khalsa principles. The split within the Khalsa ranks seriously impeded Banda's ability to counter the Mughal armies and he was eventually besieged, captured, and taken to Delhi where he was executed along with his son and followers. [1, 5, 9]

## Cross-References

- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Chandra MS (2006) Banda Bahadur: betrayed by his lieutenants. Aurva Publications, Chandigarh
2. Data PS (1988) Banda Singh Bahadur. National Bookshop, Delhi
3. Deol GS (1972) Banda Bahadur. New Academic Publication, Jullundur
4. Dhillon BS (ed) (2011) Banda Bahadur: Farsi Sarota. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
5. Dilgir HS (2007) Mahan Sikh Jarnail Banda Singh Bahadur. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
6. Singh G (1935) Life of Banda Singh Bahadur, based on contemporary and original records. Khalsa College, Amritsar
7. Singh H (1998) Banda Bahadur. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
8. Singh S (2010) Discovering Banda Bahadur. Manohar, New Delhi
9. Singh S, Kapur PS (eds) (2000) Life and exploits of Banda Singh Bahadur. Punjabi University, Patiala

## Bani

- [Poetry of the Sikh Gurus](#)

## Belief

- [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

## Bhagats

- [Sant\(s\)](#)
- [SECTS \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Bhagti

- [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

## Bhagti (Bhakti), Sikhism

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Belief](#); [Bhagti](#); [Devotionalism](#); [Faith](#); [Love](#); [Seva](#); [Takseem](#)

## Definition

Typically construed in English discourse as devotion, love, faith, or belief, bhakti can be understood as a striving for a radical transformative experience of divinity.

## Main text

### Experience, Being, and Restlessness: Bhakti as Ineffable Speaking

Bhakti was, and to some extent remains, one of the central features of the discursive and reason-based understanding of South Asian religions. It is therefore an important term not only for the study of Sikhism but also for the pan-subcontinental phenomenon of religion. This entry begins with a few comments on how bhakti has been rethought in the twentieth century by the



concerted effort of Western and South Asian scholars in order to build a frame within which to construe “the religious.” The main purpose of this body of literature is to reconceive of bhakti as a socioreligious reform movement as opposed to a body of knowledge and practice which focusses on the question of being. This shift in meaning occurs through the imposition of a socio-functionalist frame upon the idea of bhakti and the insistence that is religious phenomenon this frame can be seen operating in Leela Mullati’s *The Bhakti Movement and the Status of Women: A Case Study of Virasaivism*, where she lists five main features: (1) *bhakti* is the only sufficient and effective method of religious life; (2) it is the basic condition for developing purity in both mental and physical action; (3) the dependence on Sanskrit in religion is unnecessary; (4) the dependence on Brahmin priests as arbiters is unnecessary; (5) caste is unnecessary. [7] Recent historicizations of the concept of bhakti include *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective* by Krishna Sharma and a critique of this work entitled *The Bhakti Movement – From Where? Since When?* by John Stratton Hawley. [4, 12] Beginning concertedly in the 1960s this intellectual project gained ascendancy in relation to the discourse on South Asian religions up until the 1990s when postcolonial scholarship began to question some of the assumptions of the English scholarship on South Asia following in the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. [11] The importance of Hawley’s intervention is that this was not solely a project of English-Western scholars but one in which South Asian scholars intimately associated and one which comes to permeate the vernacular discourse on Bhakti in contemporary scholarship. [4] At a more general level, regarding the construction of South Asian religions, Arvind Mandair, in *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Post-coloniality, and the Politics of Translation*, has discussed the manner in which Orientalist scholars and the Brahmin priestly class worked in association with one another to build a meta-physical conceptualization of South Asian religion which was of mutually benefit to their separate projects of creating hegemony. [6]

The importance of beginning with such a caveat for an entry on *bhakti* is simply to raise awareness that when defining *bhakti* one is necessarily working at the crossroads of a number of discursive and linguistic traditions, precisely at the point of their interconnection. In relation to the Sikh tradition, *bhakti* can be generally understood through the definition found in Bhai Kahn Singh’s monumental *Mahankosh*: *bhakti* is a sect or group based upon devotion, worship, and service to mankind which is grounded in faith, belief, and trust. [8] He echoes the manner in which Western discourse has defined *bhakti*, as a religious devotionism which through its ethos of service sought to challenge the Brahmanical system of hegemony. [3, 6] Since at least the nineteenth century, Sikhism has mainly functioned discursively within such a framework of bhakti – Sikhism as a devotional reform movement. [6, 9] This article will try to provide a general schema of the development of *bhakti* as it is understood today from the Vedic period through *Advaita Vedanta* conceptions of *bhakti*. Secondly, it will seek to discover the points where Sikhism engages with this discourse and the possibility that at certain instances it is aloof to this conceptualization or even diverges from *bhakti*. This divergence today remains a dormant and contested aspect of the Sikh tradition.

The *Bhagavata Purana* is regularly cited by scholars as a definitive text in the evolution and formalization of *bhakti*. [1, 2, 4, 7, 10–12] However, before discussing some of the features of the concept of *bhakti* contained in this text, it is important to recognize some of the antecedent texts which make reference to bhakti. The Sanskrit root of bhakti, *bhaj*, is found in ancient texts like the *RG Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, and the *Brahmanas*. In this body of literature, *bhakti* is meant to convey sharing and enjoyment in the physical, external, object-oriented materialist sense. The object shared or enjoyed was tangible and not related to the person or forms of introspection. The reality of the object of perception was not questioned or doubted in any serious manner in this understanding of bhakti. When the *Upanishads* were being composed, the idea of bhakti appears to shift to one which emphasizes

person-to-person relations, as opposed to the person-to-thing relations as in the Vedic texts. For instance, the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* focuses on the internal sharing and emotional communication that bhakti conveys, whereas the *Maitri Upanishad* focuses on the attitudes that pervade the relations between people such as a son's attitude toward his father, a devotee's to their God, or a student's toward their teacher. [1, 10] This shift entails a movement away from the shared object orientation of experiences to an abstract idea of the relationship itself and the ways the relatedness prefigures interaction and experience. This is consistent with the introspective bent of much of Upanishadic literature and its focus on the relation between *Atman* and *Brahman* as more materialist concerns fade into the backdrop.

The focus on the relationship between people becomes more focused and acute in the two main early texts often cited in the development of *bhakti* – the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. Love for an absolute and singular god takes a central position on these expositions regarding the relationship between disciple and deity. The *bhakta*, or devotee, expresses his relationship to god through his/her love for god out of the awareness that this god is the source of everything and as such the relationship with the source of everything is one that requires total surrender. [1, 10] It is through love of god that one is able to achieve the requisite surrender since love is imbued with the power to flood the *bhakta's* mind with the constant and pervasive remembrance of his/her lord. Surrender is not the sole requirement of this relationship for the surrender entails an attitude of sacrificing for one's god. The god is cognizant of the *bhakta's* special status and as such is willing to accept whatever the *bhakta* is able to offer in terms of sacrifice. This willingness arises from their proximal interactions catalyzed through the *bhakta's* love for god. In this way the *bhakta* enters into a confraternity based upon the surrender and sacrifice toward a particular godhead.

The schematization of service and surrender can be seen in Prahlada's sixfold doctrine on service through (1) saluting, (2) praising, (3) worshipping, (4) performing duty for one's

god, (5) studying at their deity's feet, and (6) listening to stories that glorify the deity. In the *navadha* schema for bhakti, the *bhakta* receives instruction, speaks and thinks about the deity, serves his feet, bows and worships him, conceives of himself as the slave of the deity, loves him, and totally surrenders themselves to the deity. The *Bhagavata Purana* develops and reiterates this notion of love for an absolute god with the important addition of a relation premised upon debt through indenture and reciprocity. [1, 10] Heretofore, the *bhakta*, through his surrender and sacrifice, is actively involved in the support and sustenance of his godhead in exchange for the intimacy and deep communion into the secrets only open to bhaktas. An essential aspect to this secret is the experience of oneness with the godhead, through sacrifice and surrender the *bhakta* is utterly submerged into the godhead. This submersion is what is given to the *bhakta* from his/her godhead in the form of an experience of ecstasy. [1] As one is submerged into the godhead, the very premises of the relation between things are altered. In such a way the object to object relation through enjoyment is altered to orient around a more abstract but invasive form of enjoyment that is radically affective. Through this ecstatic bodily comportment, the potential for disavowing the entire paradigm of relationality comes to fruition and therefore challenges the Vedic system of ritual sacrifice through Brahmin priests. The trajectory of this thought challenges the existence of relations between things when taken to its most logical extreme, and the concerted retreat from these limits should be understood as part of the discursive project of *bhakti*.

Part of the project to circumscribe *bhakti* within the confines of a socioreligious reform movement occurs through an elaborately constructed system based upon maintain an irrevocable difference between deity and *bhakta*. The *Bhagavata Purana* identifies different types of bhakti that form a hierarchy. The first three are premised upon the principles of *tamas* (inactivity), *rajas* (activity), and *sattva* (balance) that form the tripartite formalization of *Siva*, *Vishnu*, and *Brahma* as the overarching or main Hindu deities. These principles are mapped onto

psychological and metaphysical principles. Thus, the *tāmasika-bhakta* is ruled by mean motives in his devotion to the deity; the *rājasika-bhakta* is motivated by worldly goals such as glory and power; the *sāttvika-bhakta* desires to get rid of his karma or actions one engages in out of a sense of duty. Each of these is further separated into low, medium, and high forms. [10] Ratan Singh Jaggi in his *Guru Granth Vishavkosh* describes these as *gauna-bhakti* as they are dependent on the qualities represented by three gunas and as such are unequivocally worldly. [5] The *gauna-bhakti* qualities recognize human temperaments and their interplay within an individual. Through *gauna-bhakti* human freedom is constrained and the inborn tendency of people to succumb to their innate dispositions is exploited. [1] The self remains present in these forms of *bhakti*, and therefore the motivation cannot threaten the binary distinction between deity and devotee. These three forms of *bhakti* are by far the most commonly practiced and are emphasized the most in literature. These worldly forms of *bhakti* are intimate to the notion of *dharma* (order), as *satya*, or authentic existence, comes to be understood as the form of *dharma*, whereas *bhakti* is its content. [1, 5, 12]

The extent to which *bhakti* is important in Sikh thought appears to occur through the last of the four forms of *bhakti*, *nirguna bhakti*, and its association with *bhāv*, or the transformative or futural aspects of human being, and *birhā*, the experience of restlessness. [5, 12] Richard Barz discusses the division of *bhakti-bhava* found in the *Bhagavata Purana*. [2] This division is parallel to the division of kinds of *bhakti* discussed above. Broadly, *bhakti* is devotion through emotional upliftment, *laukika* or *gauna-bhakti*, and devotion free from all emotional extremes, *alaukika* or what Ratan Singh Jaggi and Jodh Singh refer to as *parhan bhakti* to distinguish it from *nirguna bhakti*. In *gauna-bhakti*, there are four further divisions, and the emphasis is squarely on the maintenance of a relationship through the correct emotional state associated with that particular relationship with it. Firstly, *dasya bhava* is the emotion expressed through a servile attitude where a wide gulf is acknowledged between the devotee and deity. In

*sakhya bhava* devotion occurs as though the deity and devotee are equals, and in *vatsalya bhava* the relation to express emotion is through the model of parents caring for the deity as though it were a child. Lastly, *madhya bhava* expresses the emotion of love play in imitation of the desire the gopis had for Krishna. In *parhan bhakti*, *alaukika bhakti*, there is only *shanta bhava* which is devotion free from all extremes of emotion but practiced in equipoise away from all worldly distractions and bereft of all personal relationships. [2]

At this point one can begin to articulate precisely where the Sikh tradition may attempt to enact a divergence from the typical discursive forms of South Asian *bhakti*. Ratan Singh Jaggi recognizes the operation of *prem*, love, as essential in both *gauna-bhakti* and *parhan bhakti*. Through *prem*, one is able to meld with the primordial essence. What Jaggi calls *prem-bhakti*, or more precisely *bhav-bhakti*, is imbued with the *shanta bhava*, the peace which arises is not of a sensual, or *laukika*-/*guna-related* type. It is an *alaukika* form, separated from all worldly things; its position and/or state is infinitely variable but results in peaceful equipoise. While connecting to the broader tradition of *bhakti*, it is thus able to remain independent of it; it has its own limits and peculiarities. [5] In creating the binary of *gauna* and *parhan*, Jaggi merely seems to shift the metaphysical, or dual, focus of *bhakti*. Jodh Singh also echoes this formulation of *bhakti* in his work, *Sikh Bhagti: Sarup te Adhar*. However, Jodh Singh adds that this *bhakti* does rely on severing the link between worldliness and unworldliness but rather brings *Brahman* into the world as well as reinstating the focus on relationality of things in the world. As such it does not do away with relatedness, but is able to refigure the limits of relationality through *bhav bhagti*. [13] The way this is done, Jodh Singh explains, is through the idea of *birhā* which is *unbhav* or not-being – the emotion of restless disunity. *Birhā* is also distinct from the *bhavas* described in the *Bhagavata Purana*. In this way the Sikh Gurus reincorporated a speaking about *nirguna Brahman* into Sikh *bhakti* one which appears to employ a form of *jahadajahallaksanā*, or statements that include and exclude the primary sense

of a thing. Frits Staal discussed this notion in an essay entitled “The Ineffable Nirguna Brahman,” where he states that a technique which used indication (*laksayati*) as opposed to expression (*vacayati*) to develop implications (*laksanā*) instead of definitions (*laksana*) to discuss the ineffable. However, again the Sikh approach seems to differ in that it does not strictly sever the qualities from the implication as is done with *jahadajahallaksanā*. [14] In this way Sikh *bhakti* emerges as a form of emotion and experience which speaks the ineffable.

## Cross-References

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Faith](#)
- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)
- [Karma](#)
- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)
- [Love \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Yoga](#)

## References

1. Anand S (1996) The way of love: the Bhāgavata doctrine of Bhakti. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi
2. Barz R (1976) The Bhakti sect of Vallabhācārya. Thomson Press, Faridabad
3. Hawley JS, Juergensmeyer M (2008) Songs of the saints of India. Oxford University Press, Oxford
4. Hawley JS (2009) The Bhakti movement –from where? Since when? India International Centre Publication, New Delhi
5. Jaggi RS (2002) Guru Granth Vishavkosh. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
6. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the West: India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia
7. Mullati L (1989) The Bhakti movement and the status of women: a case study of Virasaivism. Abhinav Publication, New Delhi
8. Nabha BKS (2003) Mahankosh. National Book Shop, Delhi
9. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Chicago University Press, Chicago
10. Thirugnanasambhandhan SP (1970) The concept of Bhakti: Professor L. Venkarathnam endowment lecture, 1969–1970. University of Madras Press, Madras
11. Said E (1978) Orientalism. Vintage Books, New York
12. Sharma K (1987) Bhakti and the Bhakti movement: a new perspective: a study in the history of ideas. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi
13. Singh J (1996) Sikh Bhagti: Sarup te Ādhār. Vizan and Vainch, Patiala
14. Staal F (1987) The Ineffable Nirguna Brahman. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi

## Bhakti (Bhagti)

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Bhindrawallah

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

## Blue Star (Operation)

Jasdev Singh Rai  
Sikh Human Rights Group, British Sikh  
Consultative Forum, Southall, Middlesex, UK

## Synonyms

[Akali Dal](#); [Anandpur Sahib resolution](#); [Autonomy for Punjab](#); [Bhindrawallah](#); [Golden temple](#); [Indian army](#); [Sikh nationalism](#); [Sri Akal Takht Sahib](#); [Sri Darbar Sahib](#); [Sri Harmandir Sahib](#)

## Definition

Operational name given to the attack on Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) by the Indian Armed Forces in June 1984.

The Attack on Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple).

The Indian Army’s attack on Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar, in June 1984 was codenamed Operation Blue Star. It had two



components: Operation Metal, the attack on the Darbar Sahib complex, and Operation Shop, to raid places for Sikh dissenters across Punjab and arrest them. ([1], p. 406) The attack revealed a great deal about the Indian Armed Forces, the Government of India's approach to internal dissension, Sikh politics, and the Sikhs' perception of the State of India. The Sikhs call this attack "*Ghallughara*", ([2], p. 52) meaning "holocaust" or massacre of thousands and attack on the honor of the entire community.

According to the Indian State, the attack was a necessary course of action to stop growing terrorism in the State of Punjab and to preserve the country's unity and integrity. ([3], p. 10) According to many Sikhs, the attack was the result of communal electoral politics by the Congress Party, ([4], p. 232) and yet other Sikhs claim it was to suppress the Sikhs. ([1], p. 418; [5], p. 283)

## Background

There was increasing insurgency and counterinsurgency violence in the State leading up to the attack. A series of precipitating events had begun in 1978.

Jarnail Singh Bhindrawallah, the head of one of the oldest Sikh seminary, *Damdami Taksal*, the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), and *Babbar Khalsa*, an organization which revived a name from the *Babbar Akali* movement from the 1920 insurgencies against British colonialism, clashed with the police in 1978. This occurred when a religious sect (Nirankaris) considered heretic by mainstream Sikhs killed 13 Sikhs on 13 April 1978 during a demonstration against the Nirankaris who were holding an event near *Sri Darbar Sahib* and had made some derogatory remarks about Sikh traditions. ([6], p. 149) The accused *Nirankaris* were being saved from penal incarceration by the authorities for these killings through convoluted judicial acquittals. Demonstrations began against State government and the police. Sikh sentiments galvanized behind Bhindrawallah. Angered by the State's refusal to provide justice, Ranjit Singh assassinated the Nirankari head, Baba Gurbachan Singh, on

24 April 1980. ([7], p. 329) Bhindrawallah was blamed by the authorities.

Bhindrawallah and AISSF then joined the long campaign in Punjab by the Sikh political party, *Akali Dal*, for decentralization of State power and autonomy for the regional states. The campaign aims were listed in a set of resolutions named the Anandpur Sahib Resolution ([7], p. 471) which was first introduced in 1972 and subsequently adopted in 1978. Bhindrawallah's charismatic and oratorical style transformed the campaign into a mass movement. On 26 July 1982, the campaign was called "*dharamyudh*" (righteous war) ([6], p. 153) with thousands courting arrest. The Government of India became worried at the rising popular support.

## Politics, State, and Counter State Violence

In 1978 and then after 1980, the police resorted to disrupting demonstrations and protests through increasing violence, intimidation, incarceration, illegal detentions, torture, and extrajudicial executions with impunity. Bhindrawallah's followers met this impunity with counter State insurgency aimed at police officers, State administrators, politicians, and media individuals alleged by them to be promoting or justifying State's unconstitutional policies against what the campaigners considered a legitimate peaceful movement for autonomy.

The police was given wide powers through laws that were crafted for creative interpretations to frame charges and detain individuals for lengthy periods without trial. These included the National Security Act 1980, ([2], p. 86) Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance 1983, and Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Powers Act 1983 ([2], p. 86) and Unlawful Activities Act 1967 which included sedition. This fuelled the insurgency further under the leadership of Bhindrawallah. The State labeled him a terrorist and took steps to arrest him without due legal process. He took refuge in Darbar Sahib and set up headquarters in *Sri Akal Takht Sahib*. The *Akal Takht* is a building that represents the temporal sovereignty of Sikhs.

In May 1984, the *Akali Dal* increased pressure upon the Government by giving a call to farmers to withhold sale of grain to the State from the 3rd of June. This threw the Government into panic.

## Preparations for the Attack

The preparations for the attack had started about 18 months prior according to the then Vice Chief of Indian Army, S.K. Sinha. ([8], pp. 28–29) He had advised against an attack when consulted by the Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi. According to him, a full-size replica of the *Darbar Sahib* was built near Chakrata Cantonment in Doon Valley for rehearsals by 600 soldiers.

The elected Government of Punjab was dismissed on 28 September 1983, and Punjab was brought under President's rule, effectively under Central Government's ([9], pp. 105–107) control through a Governor, B.D. Pande. ([9], p. 107) He requested "aid for restoration of law and order", ([3], p. 38) the official means of engaging army in regional disputes.

According to General Brar who led the attack, the fear of impact upon national food supply prompted the Indian Government to send in the Army to crush the campaign. ([3], p. 31) The justification given by the Indian Prime Minister on the only then Indian radio station, All India Radio (State Radio), was the breakdown of law and order in the State, increasing insurgency and "terrorists" having taken control of the "holy" *Darbar Sahib*. The day chosen for the attack was a holy day in the Sikh calendar, the fifth Guru, Guru ArjanDevji's martyrdom day. A large number of pilgrims were expected. The President of India, who is constitutionally Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, was not informed of the decision to send in the army. ([9], p. 144)

## The Attack

The attack was led on the ground by Lt. General K.S. Brar who has given detailed description in his book titled *Blue Star: The True Story*. [3] The army actions in Punjab and *Darbar Sahib* were

under the command of Lieutenant General K. Sunderji. General Officer Commanding in Chief, Western Command, Lt. General R.S. Dyal, Chief of Staff Western Command, who also advised the Governor of Punjab, was in charge of "flushing out militants" from nominated *Gurdwaras* around the State of Punjab. ([3], p. 37) The overall command of actions and strategic planning were under Chief of Army Staff, General A.S. Vaidya.

The army arrived on the 31 of May. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a police force directly under Central Government, had already started engaging the armed Sikhs inside on the 1 of June ([3], p. 42) as exploratory exercise to assess the response from within. ([9], p. 145) The attack was escalated with the arrival of armed forces on 4 June 1984 with the major assault taking place on 5 and 6 June by the army. According to General Brar, he expected around 2,000 armed Sikh fighters inside the complex ([3], p. 56); in fact, there were only around 300 armed Sikhs inside the complex.

Brar deployed four infantry battalions and two companies of specialist commandos including Para Commandos and Special Frontier Force. (SFF)([3], p. 61) He further used one squadron of Vijayanta tanks and one platoon of infantry combat vehicles, armored personnel carriers (APC), and helicopters. ([3], pp. 62–64) Paramilitary forces were also used from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Border Security Force (BSF). Howitzers, grenades, *rockets* (Karl Gustav Rockets), and high explosive squash head shells (from tanks) were some of the artillery used.

The area surrounding *Darbar Sahib* and the rest of the Amritsar city was occupied by forces to stop the Sikh fighters from escaping and Sikh villagers from coming to the help of those caught inside.

The city was brought under strict curfew from 1st of June. All journalists were thrown out under the Foreigners Act, ([3], p. 54) and a complete news blackout was imposed. Communications of all forms were shutdown. Sikhs who had come to commemorate the holy day from villages were not allowed to leave the city. Many were trapped in *Darbar Sahib*.

A 70,000 strong force was deployed around Punjab to prevent rebellions across the State.

Paramilitary organizations were also deployed. Thirty-seven other *Gurdwaras* were also attacked ([9], p. 152) around Punjab. Many Sikh youth were killed in Punjab. The Government did not release numbers.

## The Resistance

The Sikh resistance was led by three leaders. The overall leader was Jarnail Singh Bhindrawalla who had about a 100 armed followers with him. The defense of the complex was organized by a much celebrated but unceremoniously discharged ex-Army officer, Major-General Subheg Singh ([9], p. 126, 140) who had earlier masterminded the Indian State-led Bangladesh insurgency war for independence. He had been joined by some 100 well-trained retired Army Sikhs. The youth was led by Bhai Amrik Singh, the President of the powerful All India Sikh Students Federation. The Indian Army was taken back by their courage and commitment. ([9], p. 187)

The complex was well fortified in anticipation of an attack by the Indian Army on 5 June. ([1], p. 400) Defenses included stocks for a long siege. The Sikhs had machine guns and adequate supply of ammunition.

## Casualties

There are various versions of casualties. According to the Army, 83 soldiers died ([3], p. 124) with a high proportion of officer casualties. ([3], p. 146) Four hundred and ninety two civilians died as recorded by the Army. ([3], p. 124) An independent journalist from Associated Press, Brahma Chellan, who had managed to escape State efforts to ban all journalists, recorded around 1,000 civilians and 200 army personnel killed. [10] Some sources have estimated 500 soldiers killed and only around 50 Sikh resistance fighters dead. The Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, while addressing the Nagpur session of National Students Union in September 1984 let slip that 700 soldiers had been killed.

There were reports of gross human rights violations. According to an independent inquiry led by Amiya Rao under direction of retired Judge, Justice Tarkunde, old people, women, and children who were trapped inside were killed at point-blank range. Many were forced to stay hungry and without water or forced to drink their urine. Some died of suffocation. Many injured insurgents were killed rather than treated. ([2], pp. 52–84) According to General Brar, while mitigating the Army's conduct, there were "truckloads" of dead bodies taken away. ([3], p. 112)

## Independent Witnesses

Journalists were sent out of Amritsar. The one foreign employed journalist, Brahma Chellaney of the Associated Press who sneaked in, ([3], p. 148) reported that a number of young Sikhs were shot at point-blank range with their hands tied behind their backs. [2, 11] He put the death toll at about 1,200. He was detained, his passport confiscated, [12] his press card taken back, and he was interrogated about his reports [10] with intention to bring charges. International condemnation of his persecution influenced India dropping charges. [13] Chellaney however went on to become a member of the Policy Advisory Group at the External Affairs Ministry of India. [14]

## Damage to Akal Takht and Other Gurdwaras

The most damage was to *Sri Akal Takht Sahib*, the sovereign seat of Sikh temporal community. The other building that was destroyed in what Brar called accidental collateral fire, ([3], pp. 146–148) but Sikhs call deliberate fire, was the Sikh Reference Library ([6], p. 156) which had many priceless and treasured historic documents and artifacts. Sangat Singh, ex-Joint Intelligence Committee member, says they were stolen. ([1], p. 405)

Many of the 37 other Gurdwaras were also damaged in parts.

## Sacred Sensitivities

Brar says that the army acted with sensitivity to the sacredness of the place. ([3], pp. 150–151) Mrs Gandhi the Prime Minister said that she had tried to avoid the attack to the end. However, Ambassador Dr Sangat Singh, an ex-member of India's Joint Intelligence Committee, gives a different account of a preplanned invasion, media disinformation, insensitive army actions, and indiscriminate killings of unarmed Sikh youth by an army that was angered by heavy losses. He quotes sources, including army, present during the attack. ([1], pp. 399–412)

The Government said that no shots were fired at the sanctum sanctorium, the Harmandir in the center of the pool itself. However, over 300 bullet holes were counted afterwards. ([9], p. 180)

## Post Attack Army Actions

The Army had been groomed to be prejudicial against “*Amritdhari*” (initiated) Sikhs. In an article in the special Army Gazette, BaatCheet, No 153, it was said that “*Amritdhari Sikhs* (initiated or baptised) are dangerous Sikhs pledged to commit murders, arson and act of terrorism” ([2], p. 28). At that time, the President of India, Commander in Chief of Indian Forces, was also an Amritdhari Sikh.

Blue Star was followed by operation Woodrose, justified to secure the State from external aggression. But this was used to round up many Sikh youth in the State. The Army stayed on for at least another 6 months. *Amritdhari* Sikhs were picked indiscriminately.

A committee set up by Punjab Government under Justice Bains found that 90 % were detained under fabricated charges. [15] There are numerous recorded cases of torture, illegal detentions, and extrajudicial executions by the army. [2] These were followed for almost 10 years in a similar pattern by the police who had added extortion to its activities.

## The Reaction

The attack stunned the global Sikh community and led to demonstrations across the world. Regardless of their commitment to religion, Sikhs across the spectrum were outraged by the attack. ([7], p. 227) Two Sikh congressmen resigned from the Parliament and two prominent Sikhs, historian Khushwant Singh and a renowned social worker called Mother Theresa of Sikhs, Bhagat Puran Singh, handed back their “honors” awarded by the State. Lt. Gen. Arora, who commanded the Indian Forces in the war for freedom of Bangladesh, Lt. Gen. Harbaksh Singh, a much decorated General, and Air Marshall Arjan Singh, former Chief of Naval Staff, were shocked. ([9], p. 192) The attack left lasting mis-giving about the Indian State.

The attack led to many Sikhs around the world calling for a separate Sikh State of *Khalistan*. A resolution for *Khalistan* was declared at Sri Darbar Sahib on 29 April 1986 by some Sikh groups. ([7], p. 399) *Khalistan* protagonists reasoned that the Union of India was no longer safe for Sikhs and had no respect for Sikh institutions. This precipitated a long insurgency that lasted for over 10 years, with many dead and many detained and tortured illegally.

Several Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army revolted when they heard the news of their army attacking *Sri Harmandir Sahib*. Sikh soldiers at the Sikh Regimental Training Centre at Ramgarh, Bihar, shot the commandant Brigadier S.C. Puri following disagreements and then proceeded towards Amritsar. Mutinies occurred in 8 out of 75 Sikh-dominated army units. ([16], p. 97)

Mrs Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, and the Indian Government were compared to Ahmed Shah Abdali, ([17], pp. 153–163) the Afghan ruler who razed Harmandir Sahib in 1762 and filled the tank with rubbish and animal carcasses. He also massacred over 12,000 Sikhs in Punjab. This was known as the great massacre, *Vadda Ghallughara*. The attack on Sri Darbar Sahib in 1984 has been called *Gallughara* by Sikhs and is now commemorated every year around the world.

Following the attack on Darbar Sahib in 1,984, the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, who had ordered the attack, was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984. The Chief of Army, General Vaidya, who had overall command of the attack, was assassinated by two Sikhs, Sukhdev Singh and Harjinder Singh on 10 August 1986. They wrote a long letter giving rationale for *Khalistan*. ([18], p. 233)

## Repairing the Damage

Mrs Gandhi went to see *Sri Harmandir Sahib* on 23 June and ordered rebuilding of the badly damaged *Sri Akal Takht Sahib* through Government funds. ([6], p. 157) The Akalis and almost all Sikh groups refused to take her (Government) money. About 150 Sikhs from an old Sikh sect, called *Nihangs*, who are well known for their ancient war dresses and taking cannabis, took on the task under their leader Baba Santa Singh ([6], p. 157) and the protection of the army which was still stationed in Sri Darbar Sahib. It was effectively rebuilt by a private contractor. The rebuilt building was called “*sarkaritakht*” (government Throne) by the majority of Sikhs.

On 1 September 1984, a mass gathering of Sikhs, called *Sarbat Khalsa*, was called by the *Jathedars* (custodians of the five Sikh *Takhts*). The Sikh President of India, Giani Zail Singh, Works Minister Buta Singh, and Baba Santa Singh were excommunicated, and the Indian Army told to clear off from Sri Darbar Sahib by 1 October or face a renewed campaign by Akali Sikhs. Mrs Gandhi, the Prime Minister, relented and last member of the Indian Army withdrew on 1 October from Sri Darbar Sahib. ([7], pp. 371–372) *Giani Zail Singh*’s excommunication was taken back and the Government lifted the ban on the powerful student body AISSEF.

In 1986, another *Sarbat Khalsa* was called at the *Darbar Sahib* by the Sikhs involved in the resistance movement, and decision was taken to tear down the *Akal Takht* and rebuild it through voluntary (*sewa*) and money of the Sikhs. ([19], p. 232) It took 9 years.

## Retaliations

Mrs Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984 [3, 9] by her two Sikh bodyguards. It was followed immediately by massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and some other Indian cities in which over 3,500 Sikhs were bludgeoned to death, burnt alive with neck tires, or simply killed with iron rods and wooden logs by mobs assisted and armed by the authorities. [20]

Several Sikh armed groups emerged in reaction to the State’s repression following the attack. Violence between these groups and the State continued for nearly 15 years. There are still sporadic acts to date.

## Justifications

The Indian Government brought out a “white paper” on 10 July 1984, justifying the attack. The Government said that the action was necessary for the unity of the country. The white paper has been dismissed as propaganda by Sikhs and incensed many. With every passing year, the justifications of the Government have been believed less and less. The Indian Prime Minister has finally apologized.

## The Issues, The Indian Army

Operation Blue Star revealed a contentious aspect of the Indian Army that is rarely discussed. The Indian Army is the continuation of the British Indian Army which was established by the British to protect British interests against dissenting Indians. After decolonization, the Indian Army has continued to act as if it is protecting the political class against the people rather than the State and its people from external invasions. In fact, much of its structure remains the same as the British Indian Army ([16], chapter 6). *Amiya Rao*, in his book, also makes this observation. ([2], p. 30)

Among the Army’s officially defined roles is to assist the Government when called to give such



assistance, in order to enable it to carry out its functions peacefully ([16], p. 159) and to maintain internal security. ([16], p. 160) Peaceful function and internal security are interpreted very liberally by the Indian Government to impose its will upon dissenting groups rather than engage in meaningful political solutions. Consequently, the army, which prides in being “apolitical” [16] and which has not really changed its philosophical outlook from protector of the regime, has been much too willing to act as the executive’s armed wing in domestic political imperatives. It attacks and kills fellow Indian citizens much readily than the armies of any other known democracy do. At any time, about a third to half of the Indian Armed Forces are deployed against fellow citizens in the various regional political disputes.

Secondly the operation revealed the readiness of the Government of India to use force against its own citizens in what are otherwise political matters. Operation Blue Star is only one of the many major offensives mounted by the Indian Government against dissident minorities since 1947. M.K. Dhar, ex-director of the powerful Intelligence Bureau, has also been critical of the use of force without adequate political initiatives. ([21], p. 321)

Operation Blue Star polarized the Sikh and Hindu communities in Punjab leading to communal politics. ([19], p. 230) The effects lasted at least two decades and continue to some extent.

In the case of the Sikhs, no tangible evidence has emerged that they were seriously asking for a separate Sikh State. Bhindrawallah, in an interview, maintained that he was neither for it nor against it, but if offered, won’t reject it. ([9], p. 92) Nor is there any evidence that Sikhs had taken up insurgency to pursue a political goal, other than as a response to State excesses.

Operation Blue Star has been named as one of the ten worst actions of the Indian State by its leading newsmagazine, India Today. Most Sikh officers in the Indian Army believed that the attack could have been avoided by adopting other measures such as laying siege to the buildings, cutting water and electricity supplies, and food going in. Four years later, this strategy was

used by the Indian Government in *Darbar Sahib*, with desired results in an action called Operation Black Thunder between 13 and 18 May 1988. ([7], p. 413)

As usual the Indian government blamed almost every major external intelligence agency, ([9], p. 210) ISI (Pakistan), CIA (USA), and MI6 (UK), of encouraging insurgency but failed to reflect on its own shortcomings and policies. These assertions were dismissed by the media.

To date no independent inquiry has taken place on the justifications for the attack or the legality of the attack without any warrants against the main “wanted” leaders. No independent human rights inquiry has been permitted on the conduct of the Indian Armed Forces or the Punjab Police subsequently. Operation Blue Star has become a permanent feature of Sikh history and, as Grewal says, ([6], p. 157) strengthened the consciousness of Sikh identity. It continues to be called “*Ghallughara*” and the attack considered a sacrilege.

## Cross-References

- [Akali Dal](#)
- [Amritsar](#)
- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Khalistan](#)
- [Punjab](#)
- [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)
- [Sri Akal Takht Sahib](#)
- [Takhts](#)

## References

1. Singh S (1999) The history of the Sikhs. Uncommon Books, New Delhi
2. Citizens for Democracy Report to the Nation, Oppression in Punjab. Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (Publisher) 1985. Amiya Rao, Aurbindo Ghose, Sunil Bhattacharya, Pancholi ND. Foreword by Justice

- Tarkund VM. First published in UK by Sikh Human Rights Group. Book was banned in India
3. Brar KS Lt Gen (2001) Operation blue star the true story. UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
  4. Singh P (2002) The Sikhs. Rupa and Co., New Delhi
  5. Dhillon GS (1993) India commits suicide. Singh and Singh Publishers, Chandigarh
  6. Grewal JS (1996) The Alkalis a short history. Punjab Studies Publications, Chandigarh
  7. Kushwant S (2004) A history of the Sikhs. Vol II: 1839–2004, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, tenth impression 2009
  8. Sinha SK Lt Gen (1984) Sant Bhindrawallah did nothing by defending the Golden Temple. The Spokesman
  9. Tully M, Jacob S (1985) Amritsar Mrs Gandhi's last battle. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. fourth impression 2010
  10. New York Times 24 Nov 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/24/world/indian-police-question-reporter-on-amritsar.html>
  11. The Times, London 14 June 1984
  12. New York Times 4 May 1985
  13. New York Times, 19 Sept 1985. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/19/opinion/topics-on-shaky-ground-case-closed-in-india.html>
  14. Centre for Policy Research, India. <http://www.cprindia.org/users/brahma-chellaney>
  15. <http://www.ihro.in/images/I-SWEAR.pdf>
  16. Kadian R (1990) India and its army. Vision Books, New Delhi
  17. Singh K (1963) A history of the Sikhs. vol 1: 1469–1839. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Indian edition 1977, fourth impression 1983
  18. Kehar S (1993) Perspectives on Sikh polity. Dawn Publishers' Distributors, New Delhi
  19. Grewal JS (1990) The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. Reprint 1998
  20. Report of Citizens' Commission. Delhi 31 October to 4 November 1984. Report by team led by Ex Chief

Justice of India, S.M. Sikri. Published in UK by Centre for Sikh Studies, London

21. Dhar MK (2005) Open secrets India's intelligence unveiled. Manas Publications, New Delhi

---

## Bodhi

- Mind (Sikhism)

---

## Bowing Bards

- Dhadi(s)

---

## British Empire

- Orientalism (Sikhism)

---

## Buddhi

- Mind (Sikhism)

---

## Buildings

- Architecture (Sikhism)

## Calendar (Nanakshahi), Sikhism

Hardip Singh Syan  
SOAS, University of London, Russell  
Square, London, UK

### Synonyms

[Dates](#); [Festivals](#); [Seasons](#); [Time](#)

### Definition

**Calendar (Nanakshahi), Sikhism:** The calendar introduced in 2003 by the Akal Takht, as a modification to the Vikrami Samvat calendar. The Nanakshahi calendar is a distinctly Sikh calendar system formulated in the twentieth century. However, the adoption of the Nanakshahi calendar has proved controversial and continues to divide opinion in the Sikh community.

### Nanakshahi Calendar

**Nanakshahi and Vikrami Calendars:** The *Vikrami* calendar was introduced by the legendary ruler Vikramaditya of Ujjain who established a new era in 58 B.C.E. ([1], p. 91) The *Vikrami* calendar was gradually adopted in many parts of South Asia, but it did not establish a monopoly. In certain regions of South Asia, the *Shaka* calendar

is more widely used: the *Shaka* calendar began a new era in 78 B.C.E. and was instituted by the Kushana dynasty. ([1], pp. 77–83) In medieval and early modern South Asia, the Islamic *Hijri* calendar was also widely used especially by Persianate kingdoms and the Indo-Islamic literati. Under British colonial rule the Gregorian calendar (more commonly known as the Common Era calendar) was adopted as the official state calendar and became widely used in civil society. In modern India the Gregorian calendar remains the official state calendar, but religious festivals are usually translated from either the *Vikrami* or *Shaka* calendars into the Gregorian calendar.

The *Vikrami* calendar is a lunisolar calendar. [2, 3] One part of the calendar is solar and the other part is lunar. The months of the year follow the lunar phase (new moon to new moon or full moon to full moon) and then intercalary months (*malma*) are inserted to harmonize the lunar cycle with the solar year. This is because the lunar calendar ceases to be linked to the seasons and thus drifts the solar year by approximately 11 days. The *Vikrami* calendar has lunar months, but solar years.

In the *Vikrami* calendar the first day of the month (*sangrand*) is determined by the solar. The days (*tithi*) are composed of a “waxing” (*sudi*) fortnight and a “waning” (*vadi*) fortnight which are determined by the moon.

The lunisolar nature of the *Vikrami* calendar means it has greater fluidity regarding the length of the year than the solar-based Gregorian calendar. ([4], pp. 16–20) Firstly, the solar portion of the

*Vikrami* calendar means the *Vikrami* months do not correspond to the season, and over centuries the *Vikrami* month will change its position. Secondly, the length of the lunar cycle is shorter in relation to the solar year resulting in more time aberrations and need for intercalary months. In addition the days in the month are not fixed each year and the dates for anniversaries will vary year to year.

The *Nanakshahi* calendar, unlike the *Vikrami* calendar, is a solar calendar. ([4], pp. 16–20) Astronomically the *Nanakshahi* calendar follows the Gregorian calendar. [5] For example, the Nanakshahi year is based on the length of the tropical year: 365 days, 5 h, 48 min, and 45 s. But significantly the *Nanakshahi* calendar is embedded in a distinctly Sikh cultural universe:

Firstly, the Nanakshahi era started from the birth of Guru Nanak on 1 Chet, 1 NS (14 March, 1469 C.E.).

Secondly, the months continue to follow *Vikrami* names (Chet, 14 March; Vaisakh, 14 April; Jeth, 15 May; Harh, 15 June; Sawan, 16 July; Bhadon, 16 August; Asu, 15 September; Katik, 15 October; Maghar, 14 November; Poh, 14 December; Magh, 13 January; Phagun, 12 February).

Thirdly, the number of days in the month has been fixed (31 days – Chet, Vaisakh, Jeth, Harh, Sawan; 30 days – Bhadon, Asu, Katik, Maghar, Poh, Magh; and in Phagun 30 days in an ordinary year and 31 days when February has 29 days).

Fourthly, the *sangrand* have been fixed on the first day of the solar month.

Lastly, all the anniversaries related to the Sikh Gurus (*gurpurb*) have been fixed along with other important days such as martyrdom anniversaries.

**The Historical Development of the Nanakshahi Calendar:** Since the formation of the Sikh community in fifteenth-century Punjab, the *Vikrami Samvat* calendar has been used. The Sikh literati dated their texts using the *Vikrami* calendar, and there are no primary sources to indicate that the Sikh literati ever felt the *Vikrami* calendar was astronomically or religiously inadequate. The Sikh community was also closely attached to

the *Vikrami* calendar because a large portion of the community was employed in agriculture. Days such as the *sangrand* were immensely important to the lives and religious practices of many ordinary Sikhs and their local congregations (*sangat*). The days of Sikh festivals and anniversaries were determined with the consultation of astronomical almanacs (*jantri*) authored by professional astronomers. The *Vikrami* calendar became deeply ingrained in the practices of Sikh society. The *Vikrami* calendar was not associated with any religious significance comparable to the Islamic Hijri; instead, it was of practical importance.

In the early twentieth century, certain members of the Sikh literati became interested in developing the *Nanakshahi* calendar. Early advocates included Bhai Vir Singh and Ganda Singh. Interest in the *Nanakshahi* calendar was driven by two main reasons: firstly, in order to cultivate a distinct Sikh identity and secondly, to accurately convert *Vikrami* dates into Gregorian dates. In Bhai Vir Singh's writings, he often employed the *Nanakshahi* date, but Vir Singh did not alter the *Vikrami* calendar; instead, he simply started the Nanakshahi era from Guru Nanak's birth. ([4], p. 16) Certain Punjabi almanac publishers also began including the Nanakshahi date along with the *Vikrami* date, but without altering the *Vikrami* lunisolar system. The acclaimed historian, Ganda Singh, made a more concerted attempt at dealing with the *Vikrami* calendar. While conducting historical research, Ganda Singh realized the pitfalls that existed when converting *Vikrami* dates into Gregorian dates due to the natural time aberrations that occur in the *Vikrami* system. In 1949 Ganda Singh published in Urdu *Mukhtsar Nanak Shahi Jantri* (comprehensive Nanakshahi almanac) in which he attempted to accurately show the *Vikrami* dates with their corresponding Gregorian dates. [6] Nevertheless, Ganda Singh's work had many scientific inaccuracies.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the most important researcher and proponent of the *Nanakshahi* calendar was Pal Singh Purewal. Purewal, a Canadian Sikh and computer engineer, began his research on the *Nanakshahi* calendar in the 1960s. [4, 5] Purewal along with like-minded scholars, including the Institute of Sikh Studies,



Chandigarh, developed the *Nanakshahi* calendar after highlighting the problems with the lunisolar *Vikrami* calendar. The *Nanakshahi* supporters felt a solar calendar would better serve the Sikh community and allow the dates of Sikh anniversaries to be fixed.

After decades of research and campaigning, the *Nanakshahi* calendar was implemented in March 2003 with the endorsement of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC) and approval of the *Akal Takht*.

**The Controversy of the Nanakshahi Calendar:** Despite the fact in March 2003 the *Akal Takht* approved the *Nanakshahi* calendar, the Sikh community as a whole had not come to a consensus on this calendar reform. Sikhs from a broad spectrum continue to resist the *Nanakshahi* calendar because they feel it will distort the Sikh tradition and disrupt contemporary Sikh society. [7] Moreover, many feel the discourse on the *Nanakshahi* calendar has been too exclusive. The implications of adopting the *Nanakshahi* calendar are significant because it will change the dates of the *gurpurb* and *sangrand*. There are practical issues of making the global Sikh community conform to these changes. Important opponents against the *Nanakshahi* calendar include the *Takht Patna Sahib* and *Takht Hazur Sahib*.

In January 2010 the SGPC and *Akal Takht* announced official amendments to the *Nanakshahi* calendar. These amendments included the observance of Guru Gobind Singh's birth and martyrdom, Guru Arjan's martyrdom, the coronation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and the *sangrand* using the *Vikrami* calendar. The introduction of these amendments reflects how polemical the *Nanakshahi* calendar has become in contemporary Sikh society. Thinkers on both sides of the argument continue to present their respective cases, but so far no consensus has been reached.

## Cross-References

- [Akali Dal](#)
- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Dal Khalsa](#)

- [Festivals \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Historical Sources \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Law and Justice \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)
- [Sri Akal Takht Sahib](#)
- [Takhts](#)
- [Time \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Vir Singh \(Bhai\)](#)

## References

1. Kulke H, Rothermund D (1990) A history of India. Routledge, London/New York
2. Burgess E (1935) *Surya-Siddhanta: a text-book of Hindu astronomy*. University of Calcutta, Calcutta
3. Pillai S, Dominic L (1982) *An Indian ephemeris, A.D. 700 to A.D. 1799*, vol 8. Agam, New Delhi
4. Purewal PS (1999) New *Nanakshahi* calendar. *Underst Sikhism Res J* 1:16–20
5. Purewal PS (1994) *Jantri 500*. Punjab School Education Board, Mohali
6. Singh G (1949) *Mukhtsar Nanak Shahi Jantri*. Sikh History Society, Amritsar
7. Chahal DS (2000) Analysis on the *Nanakshahi* controversy. *Underst Sikhism Res J* 2:48–51

## Cardinal Virtue

- [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Caste (Sikhism)

Himadri Banerjee  
Department of History, Jadavpur University,  
Kolkata, India

## Synonyms

Jati; Varna; Varnashrama dharma; Zaat; Zaatibad

## Definition

A form of social hierarchy among the Sikhs.

### Managing Horizontal Social Distinctions

The presence of caste among the Sikhs is a debated issue. A number of scholars claim that Sikhism never endorsed the Hindu caste system owing to its message deeply embedded in “worldly asceticism.” According to them, the condemnation of caste began with Nanak because he was convinced that it gave rise to social discrimination and inequality exclusively on the condition of birth. The Sikh Guru denounced it through his *sabads* and tried to counter it through setting up institutions like *sangat* (religious congregation) and *langar* (common kitchen) so that his disciples could get rid of its evil consequences. His successors continued the tradition till it reached the high watermark in the birth of the Khalsa under Gobind Singh (1699).

Other scholars have serious reservations about these claims. They hold that such assertions reflect the Book-View of caste among the Sikhs. Further those claims are neither based on any critical reading of historical source materials nor receive confirmation from the religious beliefs and practices of the community. These critics continue that the Sikh Gurus never regarded that man’s access to salvation depends upon his caste ranking. It is irrelevant in experiencing the divine truth and human liberation. In their opinion, the Sikh masters were rather in favor retaining caste “as a social convention.” It largely explains the continuation of family marriage of the Gurus “in accordance with caste prescriptions.” In this sense, the caste system is not altogether absent among the Sikhs, but it continues in a slightly different profile from that of the Hindus.

Again those who had studied the message of the Sikh Panth argue that there should not be any doubt regarding the Sikh Gurus’ challenge of the *zaat* system and its “socio-religious forms of behavior.” But their efforts were not successful because the ground reality was somewhat different from what the Gurus had taught. They required greater control and power over the contemporary politico-economic system for getting rid of the evils of the caste. In the absence of it,

they had to agree to the continuance of “inequalities” side by side with new equalities.

Punjab witnessed a number of Protestant social movements since the thirteenth century. Sikhism shared some of their concerns and looked forward to an overhauling of the existing societal set up. Long interactions with the Islam at the regional level had eroded much its traditional hierarchy. It questioned the superiority of Brahmins as well as their rules of purity and pollution. With the Sultanate of Delhi’s success in integrating the larger part of the Indian subcontinent within a common political network, the frontiers of agriculture were not only pushed to further limits but resulted in the growth of additional trade arteries and newer urban centers. These ripples of change became almost torrents in the fifteenth century and stimulated the emergence of numerous occupational groups. They stood at the bottom of social hierarchy, time and again ignored and marginalized, but still looking forward to have a space in the *zaat* system. Sikhism’s birth and progress coincided with some of their struggle for social recognition and rehabilitation. It stimulated reshuffling of the existing *Brahmin*-led social hierarchy as well as redrawing of fresh social equations as well as tensions in the rural society of the province. Medieval Punjab continued to negotiate with these forces of change.

Enterprising *Khatris* of central districts possessed many excellent qualities of leadership. Besides being village-level small-scale traders, they were long engaged in long-distance trade and served various administrative positions under the different Delhi rulers. These forward-looking Punjabis were not only aware of relational adjustment with their Muslim neighbors but also enthusiastically looked forward to some modifications in their social behaviors, religious beliefs, and cultural practices.

With human resources, administrative talent, and financial expertise, they were also regarded as the “natural teachers” of *Jat zamindars* in central Punjab. With their impressive record of agricultural transformation in medieval Punjab, the *Jats* soon figured as the most important group of revenue payers to the Mughal state from the *Majha* area. Contemporary compulsions brought enterprising *Khatris* and industrious *Jats* closer on

a common platform and evolved a social system yielding benefits to each of them. Some recent studies on medieval Punjab and Sikhism emphasize the point. Their reciprocity of interest was communicated through the extension of rural credit, the foundation of new villages, the development of agriculture, and the commercialization of trade. It explains why all Sikh Gurus were all *Khatri*s, while the bulk of their disciples came from the ranks of the peasants. Firm *Jat* control over land provided them “access to the axes of economics and politics” as well as “the mechanics of power that set the ground rules for caste” in Sikhism.

These changes led to a form of hierarchy “which differed from that of the Hindus.” It offered the creative genius of the Sikh Gurus a channel of communicating their message of social change since the mid-fifteenth century. It subverted the Brahmanical model of caste system, but legitimized higher social status to some of those groups like the *Jats*. So long marginalized as low-born *Sudras* in the Brahmin-led caste order, Sikhism offered them an additional opportunity of social mobilization. But all these social changes “did not emerge full blown” nor were “finished from the very start” as claimed by many scholars of the faith. On the other hand, they “grew over the years” though a long historical process.

Under the new caste dispensation, the *Khatri*s and *Jats* would signify two very important social constituents of Sikhism. They represent as much as the two-thirds of the contemporary Sikh community in Punjab. Their combination thus evolved a model of social hierarchy which is significantly different from that of the Hindus, but could not altogether get rid of it. The newly evolved system was no doubt “vigorously opposed to the *vertical* distinctions of caste” but managed to make room for “its *horizontal* linkages.” It ensured social dominance of *Jats* with their commanding grip over land. According to one late nineteenth-century census calculation (1881), they remained the largest human opus of the Sikh *Panth* (66 %). Their numerical predominance in Sikhism facilitated the incorporation of many pre-Sikh *Jat* social ideals and experiences in the new faith. Following them stood the *Khatri*s, though constituting merely 2.2 % of the community. Compared to

their small number among the Sikhs, their social importance remains relatively greater. In spite of occasional frictions between these two groups, but these never threatened unity among the Sikhs.

According to the same late nineteenth-century source, Sikhism also made room for the entry of other occupational groups like the *Tarkhans*/carpenters (6.5 %), *Auroras*/traders (2.3 %), *Lohars*/blacksmiths (1.4 %), and the *Kalals*/distillers (less than 1 %). The new faith could offer some of these groups a “mechanism for corporate caste mobility,” namely, the *Ramgarhias* (a composite caste of carpenter, blacksmith, mason, and others) and *Ahluwalias* (previously known as *Kalals*) underline the point. Finally, at the bottom of the social hierarchy stood the *Chamars* (5.5 %) and *Chuhars* (2.6 %). In spite of renaming as the *Ramdassias* and *Mazbhis*, respectively, after conversion to Sikhism, there was no significant change in their social status in the new faith. They continued to remain as socially unclean and face some of the worst form of social discrimination in their everyday life.

In spite of reshuffling of the prevailing Hindu caste system, the presence of these occupational groups suggests the incidence of a caste hierarchy among the Sikhs. With varied occupations and caste qualifiers, the Sikhs carry their Punjabi caste ladders outside the province. While recreating new homes outside Punjab, whether it is in the different countries of the West or in their Indian diaspora, the complex caste baggage remains an important ingredient. They also prefer to marry, like the Hindus, within their *zaat* system and stick to some specific endogamous rules of marriage. Besides its entrenched hold over the community’s marriage practices, there are other occasions when the question of caste often came to the surface and stimulated fissures in its ranks.

The Sikh literature of the last 500 years also does not miss such points. It acknowledges how Sikhism gives rise to a caste model where different occupational groups seemed to be an acceptance of an inferior social position in relation to that of the *Jats*. The presence of the *Dalit* voices reinforces the claim. It underlines how Sikhism introduces an interesting form of alternative social hierarchy which challenges the myth that the

Hindu fourfold *varna* system still holds the key to all caste questions in the country.

During the postindependence years, there are, however, a few significant changes in the contemporary Sikh caste scenario. Factors like the enactment and enforcement of certain governmental laws restricting the size of individual land holdings as well as extending some specific constitutional guarantees to the socially backward communities like the *Ramdassias* and *Mazbhis* for jobs and educational opportunities have contributed to the process. Growing popularity of the electoral politics resulted in the broadening of political awareness of these groups. It has complicated contemporary caste horizon and stimulated some radical *Dalit* caste assertions.

The province also has more than 30 % of *Dalit* population (2001). With the rise of a small section of educated elite and a tiny service sector among them, the Punjab countryside, particularly its *Doaba* districts, has become increasingly restive. Growing prosperity of the leather trade as well as massive remittance of the rich overseas brethren has stimulated redefinition of *Dalit* identity and inspired them to consolidate against the dominant position of the Jats in rural Punjab. At the threshold of the new century, these have made the provincial caste scenario extremely volatile and sending signals in many voices. It is not only witnessing the politicization of the *Dalits* but the mobilization of a section of the *Jats* against them. It led to violent conflicts in a few *Doab* villages. But it does not prompt the Chamars to “run away” from their native place. They are keen to assert their caste power in these Punjab villages.

## Cross-References

- Caste (Sikhism)
- Gobind Singh (Guru)
- Guru
- Guru Granth Sahib
- Khalsa
- Marriage (Sikhism)
- Punjab
- Shabad (Word), Sikhism
- Sikh Studies

## References

1. Singh F (1969) Development of Sikhism under the Gurus. In: Joshi LM (ed) *Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
2. McLeod WH (1975) Caste in the Sikh Panth. In: The evolution of the Sikh community: five essays. Oxford University Press, Delhi
3. McLeod WH (1997) *Sikhism*. Penguin, Harmondsworth
4. Ray N (1975) The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh society: a study in social analysis. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi
5. Habib I (1976) Jatts of Punjab and Sindh. In: Singh H, Gerald Barrier N (eds) *Punjab past and present: essays in honour of Dr. Ganda Singh*. Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Marenco EK (1976) The transformation of the Sikh society. Heritage Publishers, New Delhi
7. Hans S (1988) A reconstruction of Sikh history from Sikh literature. ABS Publications, Jalandhar
8. Gupta D (2002) Interrogating caste: understanding hierarchy & difference in Indian society. Penguin Books India, New Delhi
9. Puri K (2004) Introduction. In: *Dalits in regional context*. Rawat Publications, Jaipur
10. Grewal JS (2011) Recent debates in Sikh studies: an assessment. Manohar, New Delhi

## Chief Khalsa Diwan

Prabhjap Singh Jutla

Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, UK

## Definition

An early twentieth-century political body among the Sikhs.

## Introduction

The Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD) was established in Amritsar on 30 October 1902. The CKD was an amalgamation of the two existing *Khalsa Diwans* of Amritsar and Lahore which had formed in the early 1880s. The objective of the CKD was to promote the interests of the Sikh community in

colonial politics and to expand upon socioreligious reform begun by its predecessors. It was for this reason that the leadership of the CKD was drawn from the landed Sikh gentry, who had long been viewed by the “Punjab School” of administration as the “natural” leaders of Sikh society and the backbone of rural life in Punjab. [10] The CKD served as the preeminent religious and political body of the Sikhs between 1902 and 1920, when it was overshadowed by the Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920–1925). The secretary of the CKD and chief contact with officialdom during this period was Sir Sundar Singh Majithia, who was ably assisted by fellow Sikh aristocrat Harbans Singh Atari. Behind these two aristocrats lay the intellectual hub of the CKD, made up of the new urban Sikh middle classes, of which the economist, Trilochan Singh; the theologian and educationist, Bhai Jodh Singh; and the Punjabi poet, Bhai Vir Singh, were the driving force. [5] In 1903, the CKD began to publish a new weekly English newspaper, *the Khalsa Advocate*, to propagate its views. [6]

## Caste

One of the first reforms introduced by the CKD addressed the convention of caste in Sikh society. Caste became a problem for Sikhs at the turn of the twentieth century because the Punjab government passed the Punjab Alienation of Land Act in 1901, which categorized villagers as belonging to either “agricultural” or “nonagricultural” tribes. One result of this was that the former could not sell their land to the latter. The reasons for this law were simple enough. As a result of the commercialization of Punjab’s agriculture from the 1860s, cultivators who belonged to the lowly *Jat* caste became quite prosperous, which served to stimulate demand for cash to be invested into the land or for social reasons, such as dowries or litigation. This led to a growth in moneylending in the province, spearheaded by urban upper caste mercantile communities among Hindus and Sikhs, such as the *Khatris* and *Aroras*. By the 1870s, rural indebtedness reached record levels with cultivators losing

their land when defaulting on their loan repayments. [8] Fearing instability and a loss of control in the province, the Punjab government intervened to protect peasant cultivators, seeing itself as the bastion of rural stability through its unique “Punjab School” of administration. [10]

Inadvertently, the Act prevented many Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim castes who previously owned land from buying it in the future, severely curtailing their social mobility in an agricultural province. [8]

The Act and the caste-based associations which it spawned led to alarm among the leadership of the CKD. From its inception in 1902, the CKD established a *Zat-pat niwaran* subcommittee in order to even out caste differences between the Sikhs. [7] This was followed in 1907 by the formation of the *Khalsa Biradari*. The objective of this new association, which was closely affiliated to the CKD, was to encourage Sikhs of the lower castes to refrain from converting to other faiths. [7] Indeed, as early as 1904, *the Khalsa Samachar* had argued that if Sikhs of the lower castes were to be retained by being given *amrit* or baptism, then the number of Sikhs in the country would increase by 50,000, significantly enhancing the CKD’s access to government patronage. [1] The *Khalsa Biradari* had sixty members in September 1907, with a further 700 Sikhs ready to join its rank and file. Little is known about these members, other than they were ordinary men. Significantly, the leadership of the CKD and Majithia and Atari in particular threw their weight behind the work of the *Khalsa Biradari*. [7] Despite these efforts, the *Khalsa Biradari* could do little to remove deeply entrenched prejudices among conservative Sikhs and came to blows with the Golden Temple Management Committee in 1910 during the Sikh Education Conference at Amritsar [1] and again in 1920 when the *Khalsa Biradari* tried to perform an *ardas*. [7]

## Education

The CKD was one of four bodies which established the Sikh Education Conference (SEC) in 1908. An issue which proved to be



controversial at its founding conference in Gujranwala was a lack of female participation, despite the fact that female education was a high priority for the SEC and that women had been involved with other organizations like the Indian National Congress (INC) since 1889. [3] It was for this reason that in the run up to the second SEC in Lahore in 1909, *the Khalsa Advocate* went to great lengths to encourage female participation. [3] Despite these obstacles, the SEC did help to improve the quality of education offered to the Sikhs of Punjab. For instance, 2 colleges, 2 seminaries, 33 girls' schools, and 49 boys' schools had been established by the Sikhs by 1912. [2]

### The Anand Marriage Act, 1909

Before 1909, the Sikh marriage ceremony of *Anand* had been lampooned by conservative Sikhs, [5] who not only administered the gurdwaras but also formed the backbone of the Sikh aristocracy. In order to gain legal recognition of the Anand marriage ceremony, *Tika Sahib* (Crown Prince) Ripudaman Singh of Nabha introduced the Anand Marriage Bill in the Governor-General's Council in October 1908. However, the bill was steered through the Council by Sir Sundar Singh Majithia, who became an additional member in August 1909. Between September 1908 and October 1909, 700,000 Sikhs had petitioned the government for a change in the law in order to recognize the Anand form of marriage, while 300 mass meetings were held across Punjab to gain support for the bill's passage into law. [9] The bill was passed in October 1909 and helped to create a new Sikh consciousness which differentiated Sikhs from Hindus much more sharply than was the case in the nineteenth century. [9]

### Sikh Code of Conduct, 1910–1915

The passage of the Anand Marriage Bill in 1909 went against the grain of existing legislation. For example, in 1903 the Privy Council upheld the original judgment of the Punjab Chief Court in the

Dyal Singh Majithia Will case of 1898 that Sikhs were Hindus. Capitalizing on its legal success, the CKD turned its attention in 1910 to defining what a Sikh ought to be by developing a treatise on Sikh rituals and ceremonies called *Gurmat Parkash Bhag Sanskar*. The treatise was compiled between 1910 and 1915 and took into account the views of all Sikh associations. At the same time, the CKD sponsored and propagated the writings of Professor Puran Singh, Karam Singh "historian," and Principal Jodh Singh in support of the *Gurmat Parkash Bhag Sanskar*. [6] The ceremony which received most attention was marriage, which was not surprising given that the Anand form of marriage had just been legalized. According to one writer, however, the treatise failed in its primary objective in that it was rejected by most Sikhs in practice, who found it cumbersome to follow. [4]

### Loyalty and Patronage

Loyalty to the British Crown brought the CKD government support for its initiatives and patronage. In addition to securing the Anand Marriage Act in 1909, Sir Sundar Singh Majithia was able to convince colonial authorities to exempt the wearing of the *Kirpan* from the provisions of the Arms Act in Punjab, Delhi, and Burma in 1914 and the United Provinces and North-West Frontier Province in 1917, leading to an Indian wide exemption in 1927. [5] By arguing that the *Kirpan* was largely ceremonial and would never be used as a weapon against the State, Majithia was able to remove limits on its length. Though advantageous, loyalty would also prove to be the undoing of the CKD's influence in the religious and political affairs of the Sikhs. The CKD not only failed to condemn the actions of Gen. Dyer, who oversaw the Amritsar Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (in fact he was honored by the Golden Temple Management Committee), but also failed to secure one-third representation for Sikhs in the Punjab Legislature under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. [1]

## Cross-References

- [Amritsar](#)
- [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Marriage \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Punjab](#)
- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)
- [Sikh Studies](#)
- [Singh Sabha](#)
- [Singh Sabha/Reform Movements](#)
- [Tat Khalsa](#)
- [Vir Singh \(Bhai\)](#)

## References

1. Barrier NG (1990) Sikh politics in British Punjab. In: O'Connell JT, Israel M, Oxtoby WG (eds) *Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century*. University of Toronto, Toronto
2. Davis E (1983) *Press and politics in British Western Punjab 1836–1947*. Academic, Delhi
3. Jakobsh D (2003) *Relocating gender in Sikh history: transformation, meaning and identity*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
4. McLeod WH (2003) *Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
5. Rekhi GS (1999) *Sir Sundar Singh Majithia and his relevance in Sikh politics*. Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi
6. Singh G (1973) Chief Khalsa Diwan: fifty years of service (1902–1951). *Punjab Past Present* 7:66–75
7. Singh J (1997) *The Sikh resurgence*. National Book Organization, New Delhi
8. Singh K (1999) *A history of the Sikhs, vol 2*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 1839–1988
9. Oberoi HS (1990) From ritual to counter-ritual: rethinking the Hindu-Sikh question. In: O'Connell JT, Israel M, Oxtoby WG (eds) *Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century*. University of Toronto, Toronto, pp 1884–1915
10. van den Dungen PHM (1972) *The Punjab tradition: influence and authority in nineteenth-century India*. George Allen & Unwin, London

## Coherence

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Colonial-Era Punjab

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Colonialism

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Comparative Study of Religions

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Comprehension

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

## Connection

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Consciousness

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

## Consciousness (Sikhism)

Davinder Singh Panesar  
Institute of Mindfulness and Transpersonal  
Psychology, Barcelona, Spain

## Definition

Consciousness is the ground of being, the ultimate reality whose infinite variety of manifestations are the world of phenomena.

## Consciousness: Nature of Reality

According to Sikh philosophy, *paramatma* is self-illuminated pure consciousness. This Consciousness is the ground of being, the ultimate reality whose infinite variety of manifestations are the world of phenomena. *Akal Purakh*, timeless or eternal consciousness or Being, is described as the first principle; it is identical with the egoless self of man. From this ultimate reality, all phenomena are derived by it, all are supported by it, and into it all finally disappear, the ceaseless and infinite process of existence. [9, 14]

Atma is Parmatma, Parmatma is Atma, obtain Hari by contemplating the Shabad. [1]

Initially *angkar* was uttered and from this vibration all Existence manifested. [1]

In *angkar* alone, the apparent differences of the phenomenal world are unified. [14–16] Phenomena are all objects of consciousness, subject to the process of creation, preservation, and destruction, existing in time and space for all material objects, yet only in time for thoughts, emotions, feelings, sensation, and dreams. [3, 4, 10]

*Akal Purakh*, is singular, manifest (*saguna*), unmanifest (nothingness), emptiness (*nirguna*), unborn, unchanging, undying, eternal, beyond time, self-illuminating, never was there a time *paramatma* did not exist nor will there ever be a time when it will not exist. [11, 13] Although *paramatma* is not male or female nor it, but that or *tat* (the essence of reality), yet, within Sikh thought, all existence is considered to be feminine while *paramatma* is considered to be masculine. [15]

*Atma*, individualized embodied consciousness, is objectless, unconditioned, and pure. This is different from the *jiva*, the conditioned dynamic psychophysiological activity or ego, also known as *haumai*. The undifferentiated totality of consciousness called *man*, through its interaction with Existence, is conditioned and split into a dynamic and active self-preserving ego which perceives itself as differentiated and separate, with a sense of duality (*duja*). [5, 6, 9, 12]

At an individual level, Sikh thought discerns four states of consciousness, three ordinary states

of consciousness, namely waking (*jagrat*), dreaming (*sapna*), and deep sleep (*sukhopti*). These states of consciousness correspond to the three bodies, namely the gross body (*sathul*), the subtle body (*suksham*), and the causal body (*karan*), and a fourth state of consciousness called *turiya* or *chautha pad*. The gross body is consists of five elements, ten senses, five vital airs (*pran*), and four subtle inner faculties (*antahkarana*). The *antahkarana* are: (1) *man* or thought, (2) *buddh* or intellect /discrimination, (3) *cit* or intention/memory, and (4) *ahamkar* or I-am-ness. The subtle body is made up of the mind, intellect, memory/intention, I-am-ness, and five elements (earth, water, fire, air and space). As the name implies, the causal body is the cause of other two bodies. [9, 14]

The consciousness of life is that which experiences gross objects during the waking state, subtle objects during the dream state and the bliss arising from absence of the duality of subject and object in dreamless sleep. The *atman* is considered to be surrounded by five layers or sheaths known as *kosh*s and consciousness is “hidden in the cave” of the sheaths. [5, 6]

The three mundane states of consciousness can be summarized as follows:

1. *Jagrat* or the first state is the waking state in which one is aware of the day to day life. It is defined by the actions of the mind engaging with the awareness through sensory organs; this is described as outward-knowing. In the waking consciousness there is a continuous sense of I-am-ness (*ahamkar*) and awareness of thoughts, sensations, feelings, and so on as objects of consciousness; these are phenomena which rise are sustained and dissolve yet, consciousness remains intact and the same.
2. *Svapna* or the second state is the dreaming mind, when the awareness is entirely identified with the internal psychological apparatus, or *antahkaran*; this is described as the inward-knowing, subtle body.
3. *Sukhopti* or the state of deep sleep is characterized by the complete absence of *antahkaranvitti* or mental modifications. It is the causal body. This state is one shrouded in

ignorance in which there is no conscious awareness of experiencing dreamless sleeping state.

Guru Nanak's composition gives a vivid description of *shunya*, one considered to be unique in Indian religious literature. [9] *Shunya* is the pervading *nirguna paramatma* or *braham* as pure consciousness. [9] The three states of consciousness are directly connected with the *jiva* three bodies and arise as a result of ignorance (*avidya*) within the *jiva*. *Shunya* is the One indescribable formless (*nirgun*) Absolute in its full effulgence. Creation appears when willed by this formless *Akal purakh* (Timeless Consciousness) through the *Shunya* phase. [11]

## Turiya

*Turiya* or the fourth state is the release from the ego bondage and is experienced when "cravings/desire (*trishna*) are extinguished." Guru Nanak in his discourse with the Sidha Yogis states:

shunya is inner, shunya is outer, the absolute shunya totally fills the three worlds.

One who knows the fourth state is the witness untouched by virtue or vice.

Within each and every thing exists shunya; that shunya is the original untainted Paramatma. [1]

*Turiya* is not a state of consciousness as the other three, awake, dream, and dreamlessness dual-states, but a nondual awareness, beyond subject-object as *nirguna*, "untainted," "unfathomable," and "unperceivable" Oneness-Presence. Only through transcending the three states can the unfathomable be known intuitively? According to Guru Nanak, this state is as difficult and hard to describe as eating steel. [14, 16]

As the lotus flower floats remains untouched upon the surface of the water, and the duck swims through the stream;

With awareness focused on the Shabad, one crosses over the terrifying world ocean. O'Nanak, chant the Naam.

Their minds are singularly immersed in Oneness, free of expectations

They are the ones who see and inspire others to see the inaccessible, unfathomable One. Nanak is their slave. ||5|| [1]

## Manifesting Consciousness

Consciousness is the fundamental ground of being, infinite, unknowable, formless, unfathomable, void and silence, absolute existence. [8, 10] This, in turn, produces the three fundamental *gunas* or components; they are (1) *sattvas* (essences, the information content inlaid in all material forms, lightness), (2) *rajas* (energetic component enabling movement as vibration), and (3) *tamas* (mass or inertia, heavy, opposite of *sattvas*), expressed as spectrums of polarity. The *gunas* are the basic building blocks at the causal or primary level of existence, infinite pure potential. [9, 14, 16]

The combinations and recombinations of the three *gunas* create the subtle aspects or *tattvas* of the five elements, earth, air, fire, water, and space. These *tattvas* are the second level of manifestation. At the third level of manifestation, the subtle elements give rise to the gross physical universe, namely, energy in the form of quarks, subatomic practices, atomic particles (electrons, neutrons, protons) to atoms, molecules, compounds into objects experienced as "phenomena" at the individual level of awareness. [5, 6, 12, 14, 16]

The manifestation of creation, or *lila*, is an act of self expression of the One and as real as consciousness itself, as opposed to an illusion. One consciousness for Guru Nanak is a principle of manifestation, involution, and evolution of the universe, a self-aware universe, *karta purakh*. Guru Nanak experiences the One as absolute consciousness that manifests in all its creation. [13] This creation is not separate and independent of consciousness, rather an emanation of this consciousness called *kudrat*, that which is under the power and authority of its creator. [9, 11]

## Consciousness, Subjective Awareness, and Mind

The teachings of the Sikh Gurus considers the mind to be a subtle form of matter, whereas, consciousness is noncorporeal. *Atma* is an embodied consciousness experience of human beings; it

is reflected in the mind in two forms, the transcendental and the phenomenal forms. [5, 6, 12] The mind is a product of the *tattvas* and is the psychological composite of the four *antahkaran* (*buddhi*, *cit*, *man*, *ahankar*) [9, 12]

eh man panch tatt tae janama ||  
This mind is born of the five elements. [1]

The mind manifests continuously as dynamic activity which forms the interface between the manifesting existence on one side and consciousness on the other, giving rise to the duality of subject and object through perception. [4, 8, 12] Consciousness through sensory awareness becomes the phenomenal aspect of consciousness, awareness of form and content which is differentiated as cognizing subject, cognized object, and experience of cognition, yet fundamentally One. At the transcendental level, consciousness is experienced without the subject-object duality, as pure content-less awareness. [2, 7, 11, 12, 16]

## Cross-References

- [Aum](#)
- [Dreams \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gurmukh](#)
- [Mind \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Adi Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh scriptures
2. Austin JH (1999) Zen and the brain. The MIT Press, Cambridge
3. Baars B (1997) In the theater of consciousness. Oxford University Press, New York
4. Daniels M (2005) Shadow, self, spirit. Essays in Transpersonal Psychology, Exeter, Imprint
5. Davis D (2007) On Atmatusti as a source of Dharma. J Am Orient Soc 127(3)
6. Dhand A (2002) The Dharma of ethics, the ethics of Dharma, quizzing the ideals of Hinduism. J Relig Ethics 30(3):347–372
7. Forman RKC (1998) What does mysticism have to teach us about consciousness? J Conscious Stud 5(2):185–201
8. James W (1983) The principles of psychology (ed: Miller GA). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
9. Kolhi SS (1992) The Sikh philosophy. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
10. Lancaster BL (2004) Approaches to consciousness. Palgrave Macmillan, New York; Muthu MN (2002) Sikhism and contemporary problems of religious philosophy (in the context of 21st century). Sikh Spectrum Monthly, No. 4, August
11. Mandair A (2012) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed (guides for the perplexed). Bloomsbury Academic, New York
12. Schweizer P (1993) Mind/consciousness Dualism in Sankhya-Yoga Philosophy. Philos Phenomenol Res 53(4):845–859
13. Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (2001) Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity. Curzon Press, Surrey
14. Singh K (2002) Guru Nanak's concept of nature. Sikh Spectrum Monthly, No. 4, August
15. Singh N-GK (2005) The birth of the Khalsa, a feminist re-memory of Sikh identity. State University of New York Press, Albany
16. Virk HS (2000) Siddh-Goshti: a projection of Sahaj-Yoga philosophy of Sikhism. J Sikh Stud XXIV (2):99–107

---

## Corruption

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Creation

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Creator

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)



# D

## Dal Khalsa

Randeep Hothi  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Khalsa](#)

## Definition

Khalsa forces

## Main Text

Historiographically, the term *Dal Khalsa* is used in two ways. Generally, the *Khalsa* itself is referred to as *Dal Khalsa*, insofar as the *Khalsa* retained its militant character in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. [4] More specifically, *Dal Khalsa* signifies the reorganization of the *Khalsa* into 11 misls. In this entry, I refer to Dal Khalsa in this latter, narrower sense.

*Dal Khalsa* refers to the 1778 organization of the *Khalsa* into 11 misls (*misl* meaning “alike,” from the Arabic root [م—ث—ل]). This reorganization marked a significant institutional

development coinciding with the *Khalsa*’s consolidation of territorial control and internal organization. Prior organization of the *Khalsa*, initiated by Nawab Kapur Singh in 1733, divided the *Khalsa* into *Budha Dal* (Old Army) and *Taruna Dal* (Young Army). [3] These Dals were then further divided into 65 *jathas*. For logistical reasons, the 65 *jathas* (perhaps found cumbersome after the Sikh casualties of 1746 known as the *chhotha ghallughara*) were instead partitioned into the 11 *misls* at the 1748 *Vaisakhi* celebrations in Amritsar at the suggestion of Nawab Kapur Singh. [4] The *Dal Khalsa* was to be led under one *jathedar* (head and leader of the armies) whose council of ten *sardars* (nobles) advised him. The *jathedar* and each of the ten *sardars* also commanded their own respective forces. Retaining the distinction between *Budha Dal* and *Taruna Dal*, *misls* were mostly titled after the *jathedar* of the *misl* or its territorial affiliation. [3] The following list contains the 11 *misls* and their respective *jathedars* in 1748.

1.	Misl Ahluwalia	Jassa Singh Ahluwalia
2.	Misl Faizalpuria or Singhpuria	Nawab Kapur Singh
3.	Misl Sukerchakia	Naudh Singh
4.	Misl Nishanwali	Dasaundha Singh
5.	Misl Bhangi	Hari Singh of Panjaware
6.	Misl Kanhaiya	Jai Singh of Kanha
7.	Misl Nakai	Hari Singh of Bahirwal
8.	Misl Dallewal	Gulab Singh of Dallewal

(continued)

9.	Misl Shaheed	Baba Deep Singh
10.	Misl Karora	Karora Singh of Paijgarh
11.	Misl Singhanian or Ramgarhia	Nand Singh of Singhani

See Ref. [1]

Of the 11 *Sardars*, it was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was nominated as the jathedar of the entire *Khalsa Dal*.

The *Khalsa Dal* witnessed eight confrontations with Ahmad Shah Abdali over a period of 19 years until his final departure from Punjab in 1767. Notable events during this period included the *vadda ghallughara* (usually translated as the greater catastrophe) in 1762, in which estimates ranging from 10,000 to 25,000 Sikhs including noncombatants were killed in battle. [3, 4] There was also armed conflict against Mir Manu, the governor of Lahore and Multan. By 1762, the *Khalsa Dal* found itself with stronger territorial hold over the greater Punjab area and swelling with initiates into the order.

This period initiated a relatively stable period for the *Khalsa Dal*. However, by 1774, conflict between misls arose. In rivalry over the rule of the Jammu area, Jhanda Singh Bhangi was assassinated by the *Sukerchakia* and *Kanhaiya misls*. In return, the *Bhangi misl*, led by Ganda Singh, allied with *Ramgarhia misl* to battle the *Kanhaiya*, *Sukerchakia*, and *Ahluwalia misls*. In 1775, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia engaged in battle again. Over disagreements concerning revenue sharing in contested areas, conflict arose between *Ramgarhias* and *Kanhaiyas*, who were allied with the *Ahluwalia misl*. [3] It was during inter-misl conflict that Ranjit Singh would be deemed *jathedar* of the *Sukerchakia*. By 1799, the final Afghan incursion into Punjab was repelled by a combined Sikh regiment and marked the end of Afghan invasions into India. Within a few years, Ranjit Singh was crowned the *Maharaja* of Punjab.

Cross-References

- [Khalsa](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)

- [Misl\(s\)](#)
- [Violence \(and Nonviolence\), Sikhism](#)

References

1. Cole O, Sambhi PS (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon Press, London

2. Singh G (1990) Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. (trans: Sant Singh B). Punjabi University, Patiala

3. Singh G (1988) A history of the Sikh people. World Book Centre, New Delhi

4. Singh T (1997) Sikh struggle after Banda. In: Singh D, Singh K (eds) Sikhism its philosophy and history. Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh

Dalip Singh, Maharaja

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Synonyms

[Maharaja Dalip Singh](#)

Definition

Dalip Singh was the last Maharaja of the Lahore Kingdom, or Punjab, prior to its annexation by the British in 1849.

Main Text

Lahore’s Last Maharaja

Dalip Singh (1838–1893) was the youngest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s (1780–1839) seven sons. Known mainly as a transitional figure in the move from the sovereign Lahore Kingdom established by his father to British colonial rule, the life of Dalip Singh remains a point of fascination both within Punjab and globally in Sikh Diasporas. [1–4]

A brief period of Sikh sovereignty crystallized when Ranjit Singh set up his court in Lahore on July 1, 1799, after secretly being invited to take the city by its *elites*. Initially reluctant to take on any official title, fearing unwanted attention from neighboring powers, he was eventually convinced of the expediency of taking on the title of *Maharaja*. During the *Baisakhi* festival on April 12, a ceremony was conducted where the descendant of Guru Nanak, Sahib Singh Bedi, who placed a saffron *tikka*, or mark, upon the 20-year-old Ranjit Singh's forehead declaring him *Maharaja*. [9] In less than 50 years, the period of Sikh sovereignty would be over as the British would seize the territory through a treaty signed by then 10-year-old Maharaja Dalip Singh. As the historian Fauja Singh states, "The great kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh took 40 years of hard and persistent labour to build up disappeared within a single decade of his death". [5, 7, 9]

Dalip Singh was born in the palace at Lahore on September 6, 1838, and became *Maharaja* after Sher Singh was murdered alongside other functionaries of the Lahore court on September 15, 1843. Being so young the *Maharaja* was unable to govern and power was enacted through the *Wazir*. However, with the dissolution of the *Misls*, or chiefdom system by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the army, as representative of the *Khalsa*, took on an increasingly vital role in political and administrative matters. Eventually Maharani Jindan, Dalip's mother, became his regent with the aim of maintaining cordial relations with *Khalsa* army and securing their continued support of her son's reign. [6]

There is little direct reference to Dalip Singh's early life in literature of this period. Only scant references are to be found in official correspondences and treaties which, through his signature, bear the mark of the slow disintegration and appropriation of the Lahore Kingdom. The Treaties of Lahore signed on March 9 and 11, 1846 make reference to seizure of portions of Dalip Singh's territory and the stationing of a British contingent that at Lahore to ensure Dalip Singh's safety. The Treaty of Bhairawal was signed in December of that same year; it gave full authority over state matters to the British

Resident at and established a Council of Regency to carry these orders. Afterwards, the power of the *Khalsa* was curtailed yet the treaty appears to have done little to lessen the court intrigues. Lastly, the treaty also bequeathed sole guardianship of Dalip Singh to the British Resident thereby wresting guardianship from his mother Maharani Jindan. Such a move greatly reduced her ability to involve herself or influence matters concerning the state. [6, 8]

One of the few historical traces that remain of the young Dalip Singh's actions led to his mother's exile at Sheikhpura. On August 7, 1847, British Resident Henry Lawrence decided to hold a ceremony to confer the title of Raja upon Tej Singh for his furtherance of British interests both during and after the Anglo-Sikh War. The ceremony was held at the Lahore fort's *takhtgah*, or throne hall. Maharaja Dalip Singh was instructed to place a *tikka*, or saffron mark, upon the forehead of Tej Singh and thereby declare him *Raja*. The young *Maharaja* is reported to have flatly denied the request, crossing his arms and reclining backward into his chair. A member of the Council of Regency, Bhai Nidhan Singh, was then called upon to officiate. Tej Singh was seen as a conspirator against the *Khalsa* Army and is often depicted as a traitor. Although his actions may reflect a degree of resentment or distrust of Tej Singh, Dalip Singh's was understood to have been his mother's machination, and therefore she was exiled in Sheikhpura only 12 days after the ceremony on August 19. [8]

Maharani Jindan provides two portrayals of the young *Maharaja* prior to annexation. The first, in a letter to Henry Lawrence, describes their imprisonment in the *Samman Burj* during the Anglo-Sikh War. Persecution, helplessness, and deprivation are used to describe the experience. In the same letter, she describes how a terrified Dalip Singh came to her weeping after being frightened and taunted. A later letter, written upon her arrival in Sheikhpura, expresses deep concern for Dalip given his extreme isolation at the court. There were no kith or kin present and no one to advise or care for him. [8]

Shortly after the annexation of the Lahore Kingdom, Dalip Singh was placed in the custody

of John Login, who tried earnestly to “civilize” the young deposed sovereign. The accounts of interactions between Sir John Login and the young *Maharaja* appear to have consisted of a mutual relationship of trust and warmth. From accounts found in John Login’s correspondences, it is seen as the careful depiction of a joyful, intelligent, and artful young Dalip who was keenly interested in religious questions and had a love of falconry. However, the Maharaja’s early experiences in the court at Lahore seem to have unsettled him and instilled a deep level of insecurity and distrust. The young *Maharaja* appeared to be aware of the fact that his destiny lay in the hands of his new steward as his distrust does not appear to have been directed at Sir Login but rather at the Sikh conspirators. Sir Login expresses paternal feelings toward the boy and seems concerned about keeping the *Maharaja*’s best interest in mind while balancing the demands of employment by the Raj, the power of being in full control of the *Maharaja*’s income, and the needs of political exigency. [1, 6, 8, 9]

As a result of the move from Lahore to Fatehgarh, the *Maharaja* was separated from many of his courtly retainers and none of the court *granthis*, Sikh priests, remained in his service. During this period, Sir Login expressed an interest in introducing the young *Maharaja* the best of the Christian creed and character; Dalip Singh appears to have reciprocated by expressing interest in conversion. [1, 6, 8] As such, the period in Fatehgarh can be seen as an incubation period where Dalip Singh’s apparent interest in Christianity was brought to maturity through tutelage. Amongst the many key events in his youth, Dalip Singh appears to have broken from his caste for the first time and shorn his long hair during this period (Login, Singh, Axel).

On March 8, 1853, Dalip Singh converted to Christianity in a careful and purposeful display of solemnity, simplicity in a private residence at Fatehgarh. The conversion was seen by Dalhousie as a desirable move in that it would lessen Dalip Singh’s influence over the Indian soldiery and link him more closely with the British. The conversion made the British feel buttressed from the enmity of the Sikh soldiery due to the recent and

humiliating defeat. It is significant to note that despite this conversion, the *Maharaja* would often play the part of exotic Sikh upon his arrival in England (Login, Fauja Singh, Axel, Gell). The conversion of the *Maharaja* remains a contentious issue with many Sikh historians preferring to depict it as coercive rather than voluntary; it is seen as a stratagem to pacify Sikhs. The ambiguity is made more complicated by Dalip Singh’s repeated apostasy and silence.

In May of 1854, the *Maharaja* reached South Hampton on his way to London. Once in London, Dalip Singh soon had an official meeting with Queen Victoria. The Queen was quite impressed by Dalip Singh during the meeting on July 1, 1854. She would soon raise his rank to the same level as a European prince, and he was also made chief of the native princes of India, being authorized to take precedence after the British Royal family. Shortly after their meeting, Queen Victoria had expressed a desire to have a portrait painted of Maharaja Dalip Singh. The painting was done by a German artist, Franz Winterhalter. It was painted between July 10, 1854, and July 17, 1854. Notably, the Winterhalter portrait was not meant to depict a Sikh man, rather it was meant to show a deposed monarch who had been subdued and had aligned himself with the British crown – it was the portrait of the Queen’s war trophy. Therefore, Dalip Singh was wearing the Queen’s pendant and ring – gifts given to Dalip Singh’s father but were never worn by the late *Maharaja*. In his personal interaction with Queen Victoria, the *Maharaja* acted as a symbol of amity between the British and Sikh peoples – and was often seen in the company of the Queen (Login, Axel, Gell).

Dalip Singh spent much of his remaining life in England as a ward of the state. He was given a pension and an estate in the village of Elveden. He eventually married Maharani Bamba and the couple had three boys and three girls between the years 1866 and 1879. Life in England was not what he expected and his continuing petitions regarding increasing his pension were unsuccessful. He would return to India to visit his mother in Calcutta in 1861 and return to England with her. Their reunion rekindled the *Maharaja*’s association with Punjab and sparked a desire to

reclaim the family's grandeur and position. The *Maharani* died on August 1, 1863, and was followed by Sir John Login's death in October. The loss of both these people seems to have greatly affected the *Maharaja*, he is said to have grieved deeply. In the 1880s, Dalip Singh expressed the desire to return to Punjab to continue retrieving information about his family's estate. This news was of great concern for the British authorities who feared more unrest in the Punjab if the *Maharaja* were to return. On August 15 1883, the Viceroy of India informed the Secretary of State, London, that if the *Maharaja* were to depart for India, he would not be permitted to enter Punjab. This sentiment was repeated 2 years later in 1885. [1–4, 8]

After many failed attempts the *Maharaja* eventually left for India, only to be arrested and detained in Aden which is near the eastern approach to the Red Sea on April 21, 1886. While in Aden, Dalip Singh appealed to a confidant named Thakur Singh that he be given *khande ki pahul*; thereby, he would be reconverted to Sikhism and enter the *Khalsa*. The ceremony was conducted on the morning of May 25, 1886. [1, 6, 8]

However, nothing would come of his efforts. Dalip Singh's wife and children were sent back to England, and the *Maharaja* was instructed to be allowed entry into Europe on May 30, 1886. Dalip Singh spends some itinerant years in Europe trying in vain to gain reentry to India and search for a new patron. He eventually settled in Paris in November of 1888 and, in 1889, married an English girl named Ada Douglas Wetherill who had stayed with him during his time in Europe. It was felt by some that she was responsible for his inability to return to Punjab, and one of Dalip Singh's daughter expressed in a letter that she believed Wetherill to be a British spy. Dalip Singh suffered from paralysis in 1890; frightened by this incident he attempted to repair his severed relationships with the church, the British Government, and Lady Login. Dalip Singh passed away on October 22, 1893 in Paris and was brought to England by his son to be buried in the churchyard of Elveden Hall, the estate that had been granted originally to Dalip Singh. [8]

The legacy of Maharaja Dalip Singh continues to be plagued by the vicissitudes and vices of his life, but also it is infused with the promise of sovereignty and independence for modern Sikhs. Standing at the crossroads of history, the *Maharaja* continues to be a character that haunts the modern Sikh psyche and one which continues to be brandished by politicians, both in England and in Punjab, for the furtherance of their own diverse goals. [1–4]

## Cross-References

- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)
- [Misl\(s\)](#)
- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Axel BK (2001) The Nation's tortured body: violence, representation, and the formation of a Sikh "Diaspora". Duke University Press, Durham
2. Ballantyne T (2004) Maharaja Dalip Singh, history, and the negotiations of Sikh identity. In: Sikhism and history. Oxford University Press, Oxford
3. Ballantyne T (2006) Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world. Duke University Press, Durham
4. Gell SMS (1996) The origins of the Sikh "Look": From Guru Gobind to Dalip Singh. *Hist Anthropol* 10:37–83
5. Latif SM (1994) History of the Panjab. Kalyani Publishers, Ludhiana
6. Login LC (1989) Sir John Login and Duleep Singh, 3rd edn. Languages Department Panjabi University, Patiala
7. Singh F (1982) After Ranjit Singh. Master Publishers, New Delhi
8. Singh F (1977) Maharaja Duleep Singh correspondence. Panjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (2004) A history of the Sikhs, vol I. Oxford University Press, New Delhi

## Darshan

- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Pilgrimage \(Sikhism\)](#)



## Dasam Granth

### ► Poetry of the Sikh Gurus

## Dastaar

### ► Turban (Sikhism)

## Dates

### ► Calendar (Nanakshahi), Sikhism

## Death (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

The notion of death and dying in the Guru Granth Sahib is grounded in a standpoint of what can be variously referred to as ego loss, death of the ego, or dying to the self which when achieved is referred to as *jivan mukti*. The person who is able to attain such a death is called a *gurmukh* as opposed to a *manmukh* or ego-centered individual who dies a typical mortal death.

### A Paradoxical Notion of Death

Based on the writings of the Sikh Gurus in the *Guru Granth*, one cannot comprehend the phenomenon of death without simultaneously comprehending life – something they at times refer to as *maran jivan ki sojhi pae*. References to death are fairly common in the *Guru Granth*. Common terms used figuratively for death in the *Guru Granth Sahib* include *kal*, *mritya*, *jamadutt*,

and *lavi lunia*. The term *kal* literally means time, darkness. As the term *maran kal* it connotes the time of one's death, suggesting that death constantly gnaws at the fabric of life, yet man remains ignorant of it. The terms *jama* or *jamadutt* refer to death's myrmidon or an entity responsible for collecting departed souls. This term is derived from *Yama*, the Vedic god of death, *mritya* (lit. mortality). *Lavi lunia* is another figurative term that refers to the reaper who shears the crops when they are ready for harvesting. The prevalence of these references is not because the Sikh Gurus were pessimistic about this world. On the contrary, it is because they envisaged mortality as a cycle of life-death, or what they phrased as *janam-maran ka chakar*. As Guru Nanak so poignantly reminds us about the last stages of life,

*The ninth stage sees shortness of breath and white hair,  
In the tenth the body burns till only ashes are left  
and the funeral party utters laments.  
Life came, and is gone, and so too one's delusions of fame,  
Leaving only the offering for crows.  
Nanak, the love of the self-led is blind  
Without the true Guru the world drowns in darkness.* (GGS, p. 137)

According to Nanak, even the prophets, gods, demigods, and other divine beings are not immune to the rule of mortality:

*Death inevitably strikes  
Even the likes of Indra.  
Brahma's domain is subject to death  
Likewise Shiva's world is fated to come to nothing.* (GGS, p. 237)

Every being, sentient, and nonsentient comes into existence “with death as its written fate” (GGS, p. 876).

*Death does not wait for auspicious days.  
Or ask whether it's the light or dark side of the month.  
Some are treated harshly, others well cared for.  
Some leave armies and mansions to the sound of drums.  
Nanak, this heap of dust returns to dust.* (GGS, p. 1254)

Mortality encompasses life and death, creation and destruction, as inseparable processes; it is not something to be morbid about but rather

a constant reminder that one should cherish life and not be swayed by the false pretences of ego which cocoons itself in delusions of immortality.

Current scholarship which treats of nature of death in the Sikh tradition is based largely upon the prevalence of terms in the Guru Granth Sahib such as *akal*, *amrita*, *amar*, *amarpad*. At first glance, these terms appear to be simple negations of *kal*, *mrityu*, *marana*, etc. This leads to the impression that *akal/kal*, *amrita/mrita*, *mar/amar*, or *marana/amarapad* are simply binary opposites; the temporal qualities associated with time, death, dying (*kal*, *mritya*, *marana*) – specifically the notion of change and becoming – can simply be negated to give timelessness, eternity, immortality (*akal*, *amrita*, *amar*, *amarapad*), etc. The understanding of these terms as negations has led to a common source of confusion about the nature of death. This confusion arises from a modernist interpretation that imports a metaphysical framework which is not operative in the Guru Granth Sahib. This misinterpretation arises from a project that attempts to ground the meaning of Sikh scripture in the *deathless* existence of a deity that transcends time and world. The effect of this interpretation is that it leads to a devaluation of the worldly time, the time of life-death, while concomitantly privileging a hypervaluation of the timelessness of eternity or immortality. However, the grounding of Sikh scripture in an existence of such a deity is antithetical to the notion of *hukam* understood as an immanent imperative of constant becoming, differentiation, hence creativity within all existence.

This confusion is easily remedied if we delve a little more deeply into the notion of death and dying in the Guru Granth Sahib and adopt the paradoxical standpoint that it propagates. This is the standpoint of what is variously referred to as ego loss, death of the ego, or dying to the self. The writers of the Guru Granth Sahib are unanimous in stating that *akal*, *amarpad*, *amrita* (eternity, immortality) are not indicators of a timelessness that is outside or beyond time, etc. but signify liberated states of existence where one is simultaneously in time and eternity, or mortal and immortal. The difficulty resides in breaking with the

everyday understanding of terms *akal*, *amrita*, *amarpada*, an understanding that is generated from the standpoint of egocentric individuality (*manmukh*) which engrosses the individual in conventional death, accompanied by a fear of death and dying. As Guru Amardas writes,

*Egocentrics are born only to die, yet even their deaths are a waste.*

*Attached to duality their souls are scourged.*

*Always saying 'me, mine, my own' they are ruined.*

*Without examining their Self, they drown in doubt.*

*True death is attained by those who die to the Word.*

(GGS, p. 363.)

Rather, by dying to the ego, by learning how to lose ego, one can achieve a liberation in life (*jivan mukti*) that brings about the death of conventional death, or the death of everyday time (*kal kale*). Such liberation is also spoken of as achieving a state of eternity, but one which does not signify an extended time, or a state beyond mortality. The eternal state – variously referred to as *akal*, *amrita*, *amarpad* – is paradoxically entirely mortal. To achieve such a state of existence one can avoid “the portals of biological death.” Such states are entirely achievable while one is still alive. Those who manage to achieve this state of *akal*, *amrita*, *amarpad* while alive are known as *jivan mukt* or *gurmukh*. But to achieve this state one has to die to the self, and the favored way of dying to the self is to die to the Word, which in essence means that one has to transform the everyday practice of language use based on the centrality of self-naming (where the “I” becomes the center of existence) into a practice of language where one simply names without centering it on the “I.” The latter is equivalent to repeating the divine Name, which in effect means the “not-I” (for details see Mandair [3]):

*Few indeed know the Guru's Word,*

*Through which one kills the self/I to attain release.*

*Such dying is not death as such*

*But a merger into the state of equipoise.* (GGS 120)

*By meditating on the nature of one's self*

*One learns to die while still living.* (GGS 935)

*If one dies to the Word*

*Such death is truly blessed.* (GGS, p. 1067)

The notion of true death as dying to oneself has kindred resonances in Sikh social practices, ceremonies, and in the way that Sikhs remember the

lives and deaths of the ten historical Sikh Gurus. Shortly prior to the time of their physical deaths, each Guru, beginning with the first, Guru Nanak, performed an initiation ceremony signifying the passage of authority from one master to his successor. The ceremony itself involved the initiate drinking *charan pahul* (lit. the water of immortality sanctified by the touch of the master's foot) into which the existing master had dipped his toe. The drinking of *charan pahul* signified an act of total self-sacrifice or dying to the self in order to live as transformed being (*gurmukh*). The other part of this ceremony involved the old Guru prostrating himself before the new Guru in a reverse act of self-sacrifice signifying that the old master had now become the initiate (or Sikh) of the new Guru. The foundational meaning of this ceremony was to show the intertwined nature of death and life, that life goes on after death, but never in the same form. A different form of this blessed dying through self-sacrifice was enacted by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, when he abolished *charan amrit* and initiated a new order of Sikhs called the Khalsa in 1699. On March 30th of that year Guru Gobind Singh tested the resolve of his followers by inviting them to offer him their heads. Five Sikhs volunteered to sacrifice their heads. The new initiation ceremony which was fashioned after that event came to be called *Khanda ka Pahul* (initiation of the sword) and encapsulated the earlier sense of symbolic sacrifice or dying to the self. The initiate is required to die to his past *samskaras* by relinquishing old social ties and beliefs, and be reborn into the Guru's family. These new initiates, or *khalsa*, are like "kindred spirits who served their master while they lived and keep him in mind at the moment of their death" (GGS, p. 1000). Far from fearing death, they envisage death as a long-awaited union with the Beloved from whom they have been separated, and yearn for their departure to their "real home" (*nij-ghar*). Death therefore marks the day of union with their Beloved, the divine spouse. As such it is not an occasion for grief.

In accordance with the teaching practices specified by the Sikh Gurus the death rites are a relatively simple and dignified affair. Those

mourning the loss of a loved one are expected to maintain a state of mental equipoise, and not to indulge in loud lamentation. Indeed, lamentation over death is strongly discouraged in Sikh practice as can be verified from a verse, "The Call," in the Guru Granth Sahib which records the death of the third Guru Amar Das:

*By his wish Guru Amar Das called his entire family to himself and said:*

*No one after me should lament and cry,*

*Such cries will in no way please me. (Ramkali Sadd, GGS)*

## Sikh Bereavement and Funerary Practices

Like Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, Sikhs practice cremation. The cremation ceremony is a family occasion. Members of the family wash and clothe the body in clean garments and the five Ks. In India the body is laid in a bier and taken to the cremation ground where the pyre will be lit by the eldest son or by a close relative. In India, because of the hot climate and relative paucity of arrangements for preserving corpses, this often happens on the day of or day after the death. When a Sikh person appears close to death, their family will come to their bedside and recite *Sukhmani*, a long hymn meaning "Pearl of Peace" composed by the fifth Guru, Arjan, for times of suffering and grief. In the UK and North America palliative care units or hospital wards are able to make arrangements for a Sikh *giani* (or minister) to visit and console the dying person and recite hymns such as *Sukhmani*. Some families opt to do this themselves.

Sikh funerary practices normally follow the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* (Sikh Code of Conduct) which specifies the following approved rites and practices:

- a. The body of a dying or dead person, if it is on a cot, must not be taken off the cot and put on the floor. Nor must a lit lamp be placed beside, or a cow got bestowed in donation by, him/her or for his/her good or any other ceremony, contrary to Guru's way, performed. Only Gurbani should be recited or "*Waheguru, Waheguru*" repeated by his/her side.
- b. When someone shuffles the mortal coil, the survivors must not grieve or raise a hue and cry or

indulge in breast beating. To induce a mood of resignation to God's will (*hukam*), it is desirable to recite Gurbani or repeat "*Waheguru*".

c. However young the deceased may be, the body should be cremated. However, where arrangements for cremation cannot be made, there should be no qualm about the body being immersed in flowing water or disposed of in any other manner.

d. As to the time of cremation, there should be no consideration as to whether it should take place during day or night should.

e. The dead body should be bathed and clothed in clean clothes. While that is done, the Sikh external symbols- *kangha* (small wooden comb), *kachcha* (short breeches), *kara* (iron wrist bracelet), *kirpan* (short sword or dagger) - should not be removed. Thereafter putting the body on a plank, an *Ardas* or short prayer is offered to mark the body's being taken away for disposal. The hearse should then be lifted and taken to the cremation ground. While the body is being carried to the cremation ground, hymns that induce feelings of detachment should be recited. On reaching the cremation ground, the pyre should be laid. Then the *Ardas* for consigning the body to fire should be offered. The dead body should then be placed on the pyre and the eldest son or any other relation or friend of the deceased should set fire to it. The accompanying congregation should sit at a reasonable distance and listen to *kirtan* or carry on collective singing of *shabads* (hymns from the *Guru Granth Sahib*) or recitation of *shabads* that induce a mood of detachment. When the pyre is fully aflame, the *Kirtan Sohila* (prescribed preretirement night Scriptural prayer) should be recited and the final *Ardas* offered. The congregation should then leave.

Coming back home, a reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* should be commenced at home or in a nearby Gurdwara, and after reciting the six stanzas of the *Anand Sahib*, the *Ardas*, offered and *Karah prashad* (sanctified sweet-meal) distributed. The reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* should be completed on the tenth day. If the reading cannot, or is sought not to, be completed on the tenth day, some other day may be appointed for the conclusion of the reading having regard to the convenience of the relatives. The reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* should be carried out by the members of the household of the deceased and relatives in cooperation. If possible, *Kirtan* (congregational singing) may be held every night. No funeral ceremony remains to be performed after the "tenth day."

f. When the pyre is burnt out, the whole bulk of the ashes, including the burnt bones, should be gathered up and immersed in flowing water or buried at that very place and the ground leveled. Raising a monument to the memory of the deceased at the place where his dead body is cremated is taboo.

g. The following post-funerary practices are also contrary to the approved code. *Adh Marg* (the ceremony of breaking the pot used for bathing the dead body amid doleful cries half way towards the cremation ground); organised lamentation by women; *foorhi* (sitting on a straw mat in mourning for a certain period); *diva* (keeping an oil lamp lit for 360 days after the death in the belief that that will light the path of the deceased); *Pind* (ritual donating of lumps of rice flour, oat flour, or solidified milk (*khoa*) for ten days after death); *kirya* (concluding the funeral proceedings ritualistically, serving meals and making offerings by way of *Shradh*; *Budh Marna* (waving of whisk, over the hearse of an old person's dead body and decorating the hearse with festoons), etc. So too is the picking of the burnt bones from the ashes of the pyre for immersing in the Ganga, at Patalpuri (*Kiratpur*), at Kartarpur Sahib or at any other such place.

Sikh funerals in Western countries follow the *Rahit Maryada* as far as possible. However, the cooler climates, coupled with the prevalence of funeral homes which provide facilities for preserving the body indefinitely, allow for more flexible funeral arrangements and an extended bereavement period. This is especially helpful for Sikh families that are dispersed across different continents. Thus, it is not uncommon to see families delaying funerals by a few days or longer to allow close relatives to gather for the final ceremonies. During this interim period the body will be kept at a nearby funeral home. Relatives and friends are able to visit and console the grieving family members prior to the funeral. Mourners will sit in a room around the family members. The conversation and words of consolation will focus less on the sadness of the occasion or the loss of the person concerned, and more on the good memories of the deceased. In conformity with North Indian traditions, mourners (especially women) normally wear white or light-colored clothing. In Western countries, men have increasingly opted to wear darker clothing, usually a black jacket or coat, although this is not a requirement by any means. A day before the funeral close family members will visit the funeral home to wash and dress the body. The washing process is usually overseen by staff at the funeral home, who are normally well trained about Sikh etiquette and customs. Many funeral homes have

a small chapel or similar room, where family members can recite *ardas* following the dressing of the body. On the morning of the funeral the coffin containing the body is brought to the family home in the hearse. Friends and relatives gather once more, and after a short *ardas* the funeral cortege makes its way to the crematorium. As the cremation fire is lit and made ready to receive the body, *kirtan sohila* is sung, followed by a recitation of *ardas* in which blessings are sought for the departed soul.

After the cremation mourners can go to a nearby *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple) where there will be a formal service to remember the deceased or the party can return to the home of the deceased. Either way, the completion of the funeral day is marked by the distribution of *karah parshad*. Once the main part of the funeral is over, it is customary for a complete reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* to be undertaken in the house of the deceased. This reading must be completed in 10 days. In India the immediate family members return to the cremation grounds after 48 h to retrieve the ashes, which are then placed in the flowing waters of a nearby river or stream, very often the river Sutlej. Sikhs in the West usually take the ashes back to Punjab, where they will be disposed of at Kiratpur into the Sutlej.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Khalsa](#)

## References

1. Singh M (1996) *Guru Granth Sahib: English and Punjabi translation*. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar
2. Singh H (1998) Death. In: *The encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
3. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
4. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York

---

## Debauchery

- ▶ [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Deduction

- ▶ [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Degeneracy

- ▶ [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Desi and Margi

- ▶ [Music \(Sikh Popular and Religious\)](#)

---

## Design

- ▶ [Architecture \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Devotionalism

- ▶ [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Dhadi Var

- ▶ [Music \(Sikh Popular and Religious\)](#)



## Dhadi(s)

Michael Nijhawan  
Department of Sociology, York University,  
Toronto, ON, Canada

## Synonyms

Bowing bards; Mirasi(s)

## Definition

Dhadi is a form of bardic song recitation that is historically found in the north and northwest regions of the Indian subcontinent (Punjab, Rajasthan, Sindh). As a cultural practice it is associated with genealogical and other narrative traditions such as the Punjabi *qissa* (ballad) or *var* (heroic song). A dhadi group is typically formed by a sarangi player along with two drum players who act as vocalists as well. Dhadis have shown a pattern of fluctuating affiliations to religious traditions, ranging from Hindu, Muslim to Sikh patronage. After the partition of India in 1947, a majority of dhadis in Punjab have become exclusively associated with Sikh religious organizations and known for their more focused repertoire of Sikh martyr songs.

## Historical Trajectories and Intricacies of Memory

Whereas dhadis form a community of musicians situated at the social margin of contemporary Punjabi society, the social history of the dhadi genre nonetheless provides important insights into issues of interculturality and interreligiosity in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial South Asia. [7] Available historical work on musical and poetic traditions in India under Mughal authority indicates the once prominent place of dhadi musicians. [1, 5, 6] The performers have

been associated with Jat and Rajput patronage in Rajasthan, [1, 5, 14] and they are mentioned in the context of venerating the Hindu poet saints [14–16] or the Sufi shrines in Sindh and Punjab; [4, 8] they are also acknowledged as musical community at various royal courts [1, 5, 6, 13, 17] such as the kingdoms of Nabha or Patiala in Punjab. [13] Finally, there is a long record of actively engaging dhadi music in the context of Sikh religion. [7, 10, 13]

It is possible to draw a poignant picture of dhadis in precolonial times, both as a somewhat distinct social community of bowing bards and genealogists [5, 6] and also as performers of specific genres of song recitation such as the Rajasthani *doha* [15] or Punjabi *qissa*. [7, 12, 13] To the extent to which dhadis have learned to adapt as well as to shape the specific aesthetic formats and narrative contents associated with their respective forms of patronage, [6, 7, 9] they have retained a flexibility in self-identification and affiliation to these patrons. This holds in regard to gender performance – there are not only male but also female vocalists [*dhadini*] mentioned in the records [1, 7, 14, 17] – and the performance of gendered idioms that range from strongly masculinist to nuanced feminine articulations of suffering and pain. [7, 13] But it also applies to the fluidity in social and religious affiliation, which especially in the Punjabi context of folk festival practice and Sufi shrine veneration has earned them a reputation for upholding values of religious pluralism.

The aspect of religious boundary crossing associated with this tradition, in combination with the impact of British census categorizations that led to the ensuing social reclassification from dhadi to the broader designation of mirasi, [2, 4, 6, 7] has likely contributed to a sudden demise of the genre's reputation in the context of religious reformism in the late nineteenth century. Recent work on Punjabi vernacular sources however suggests that despite these historical ruptures (a process that the dhadi genre shares with other South Asian performance traditions), it has also served as an important venue to practically engage in

contexts of Sikh religious reform, especially among rural-based, nonelite groups, where the genre remained popular well into the 1960s. [7] In this context, the dhadi genre further contributed to the vernacularization of newly imported narrative forms and modern ideas associated with the advent of print capitalism and the influence of Western historical and religious discourses on indigenous genres such as the *itihās*. [7]

In regard to the politicization of vernacular spaces of religious affiliation and imagination, research shows how religious identification became more important for Punjabi dhadi performers who up until the mid-twentieth century have been predominantly Muslim by name. [4, 7, 8] The Partition of 1947 has caused a major caesura in that regard, as especially the families of genealogical *mirāsī* performers migrated to Pakistan. [7, 8] This left a void in terms of the breadth and quality of performed musical genres and memories, which was subsequently replaced by a post-Partition Sikh dhadi tradition that became almost exclusively invested in Sikh historical discourses with a specific focus on the performance of martyr stories. [7, 8, 10]

### Dhadi and Sikhism: Continuities and Ambiguities

Among the various contexts of dhadi patronage, the Sikh tradition has certainly been a key. Sikh hagiographic materials show a long record of affiliation ranging from the Sikh gurus' patronage of dhadi performers, to their presence in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, to contemporary Sikh institutions and gurdwaras in India and abroad. [7, 9] Guru Hargobind is consistently mentioned as the original patron by Sikh dhadi performers, even though Sikh records trace the association back to Guru Nanak's times, Nanak himself using the epithet in his hymns. [7, 10, 13] Guru Arjan specified nine specific poetic genres (*var*) in the Sikh Scriptures (*Adi Granth*), with particular information on rhythm and style, which are still associated with dhadi music, though the respective melodies

are hardly performed anymore and have been replaced by folk tunes and standardized drum rhythms outside of the realm of *Gurbani* recitations. [7, 13] The memory of the Sikh gurus' patronage can still be felt when present day Sikh dhadi performers advertise their gatherings as *dhadi darbar*. [7]

Despite these strong and continuing affiliations, the relationship between Sikh patronage and dhadi genre is complicated even at a level where tradition presumes a high degree of conformity. [7] On the one hand, this relates to the question of social status, for the majority of dhadis are associated with lower caste groups such as the *mardana* or self-identified *Dalit* groups in Punjab. [7] On the other hand, both social affiliation and performance idioms of dhadi music have demonstrably changed in the wake of critical political events. [7, 8] Whereas dhadi repertoires used to be broad in scope, stretching from female genres of lament associated with *virah git* and *sarangi* music [1, 11] to the invigorating male performance of a heroic *var*, dhadis contributed to and mirrored a transformed politics of aesthetic emotions in the context of political violence. [7] In the context of the Punjab crisis in 1984, dhadi songs circulated as tape recordings and acquired a reputation as "songs of the Sikh resistance movement". [10] Following 1984, there was an increased presence of dhadi music and dhadi performers among supporters of Sikh nationalism in Punjab and diaspora contexts. [3]

Whereas the Sikh *gurdwara* remains one of the main venues where dhadi music is staged in the typical *dhad-sarangi* format, young musicians and DJs in the diaspora have started to experiment with dhadi vocals and drum patterns by integrating them into electronic-based drum and bass music, which has been partially inspired by the genre's association with political resistance and as an alternative format to dominating musical aesthetics of Punjabi Bhangra. [3] In this respect, dhadi music has also become part of a process of reconfiguring memories of political violence and has thus contributed to an emerging activist agenda of Sikh diaspora youth. [3]

## Cross-References

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Folklore \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Migration, Sikh](#)
- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Punjab](#)

## References

1. Bor J (1987) The voice of the sarangi. *Quarterly J Nation Cent Perform Arts* 15:6–178
2. Ibbetson SD (1994[1883]) *Punjab castes*. Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore
3. Kalra V, Nijhawan M (2007) Cultural, political and linguistic translations. *Dhadi 'Urban' music*. *Sikh Form* 3(1):67–80
4. Nayyar A (2000) Musical regions: Punjab. In: Arnold A (ed) *The garland encyclopedia of world music*. Garland, New York/London
5. Neuman D (2010) Dhadis and other bowing bards. In: Bor J (ed) *Hindustani music: 13th through 19th (or 20th) centuries*. Manohar, New Delhi
6. Neuman D (1980) *The life of music in North India*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit
7. Nijhawan M (2006) *Dhadi darbar*. Religion, violence, and the performance of Sikh history. Oxford University Press, Delhi
8. Nijhawan M (2004) Shared melodies, partitioned narratives. An ethnography of sikh and sufi dhadi performance in contemporary punjab. *Int J Punjab Stud* 10(1–2):57–77
9. Nijhawan M (2003) From divine bliss to ardent passion: exploring Sikh religious aesthetics through the dhadi genre. *Hist Relig* 42(4):59–85
10. Pettigrew J (1992) Songs of the Sikh resistance movement. *Asian Music* (Fall 1991–1992):85–118
11. Qureshi R (2000) How does music mean? Embodied memories and the politics of affect in the Indian sarangi. *Am Ethnol* 27:805–838
12. Swinnerton C (1903) *Romantic tales from the Punjab*. Archibald Constable, London
13. Thuhi H (2011) The Folk Dhadi genre (trans: Schreffler G). *J Punjab Stud* 18(1 & 2):131–168
14. Vaudeville C (1999) Dalmia V (ed) *Myths, saints and legends in medieval India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
15. Vaudeville C (1964) Kabir and interior religion. *Hist Relig* 3:191–201
16. Vaudeville C (1962) *Les Duha de Dhola-Marū*. Une ancienne ballade du Rajasthan. Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondichéry

17. Wade BC (1998) *Imaging sound*. An ethnomusicological study of music, Art and culture in mughal india. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London

## Dharam

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Dharam (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

*Dharam* is the Punjabi form of the Sanskrit word *dharma* which is a noun. Etymologically *dharma* comes from the Sanskrit root *dhri*, the meaning of which is “to support, to hold, to bear.” In Hinduism the word has been used in more than one sense, for example, (a) the principle or law that holds the universe; (b) individual conduct which is in conformity with that higher principle; (c) basic nature or essential nature of a thing, for example, the essential function or nature of fire is heat; (d) individual duty or obligation according to one’s caste and stage in life which is called *varnasharma dharma* or *vishesha dharma*; (e) one of the four purusarthas or objectives of human life, i.e., *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. In the Macmillan Dictionary, *dharma* has been explained in the following manner: “In Indian religions, the basic natural law of the universe. Synonyms or related words for this sense of dharma-Hinduism and Sikh religion: *acharya*, *ashram*, *Baba*, *Brahman*, *caste*, *Dalit*, *devi*, *dharma*, *dhoti*, *Divali*.” This statement or interpretation of synonyms does not seem much agreeable. Similarly, its translation in English as “religion” does not convey the exact meaning.

According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *dharam* is a Sanskrit word and noun and the word *dharam* has been used in many connotations. He has cited examples from the *baani* of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* for every kind of usage: (1) The sacred law which holds or supports the universe, as in “balio chraagu amdhaar meh sabh kali udhari eik naam dharam- *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*”; (2) good deeds, as in “*nahi bilamb dharam bilamb paapm*,” S.G.G.S, p. 1354, and “*saadh kai sangi dirarhy sabh dharam*,” S.G.G.S, p.271; (3) religion (*mazhab*, *deen*), as in “*sant ka maarag dharam ki paurhi*”; (4) virtuous or meritorious form, as in “*ihu sareeru sabhu dharam hai jis amdari sache kee vichi joti*,” S.G.G.S. p.309; (5) ritual; (6) duty; (7) justice or righteousness; (8) the basic or essential nature; (9) *dhnush* (bow); (10) the qualities of the elements; etc. So it is evident from the interpretation given by Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha that the word “*dharam*” conveys more than one meaning as a concept.

In the *baani* of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the word *dharam* has occurred with different spellings – including “*dharama*,” “*dharamu*,” and “*dharami*” – but this does not make any difference to the meaning of the concept. While keeping in view Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha’s interpretation of the word “*dharam*,” it would be more easy to look into the usage of the word at different levels in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the primary source of Sikh philosophy. In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the very first usage of the word is made by Guru Nanak in “*Japji*” in the sense of the highest principle which is the support of the universe, while the words “*magu*” and “*panthu*” are used for a particular prescribed faith or religion. While describing the stages and ways of knowledge as “*sunyai*,” “*manne*,” and “*ek dhyam*” or knowledge by hearing, reflection, and contemplation, in the second stanza of “*manne*” Guru, Nanak says that “by reflection on the perceptual knowledge, or knowledge by “hearing” (*sunyai*), one does not go by the particular faith or religion; instead, one becomes related to the higher principle which is the support of the universe or by which this whole universe is being held and supported. By this kind of knowledge through contemplation, one shall not

stray into sects and byways but will be related to the higher principle, the *dharam*”. [1]

To make it more understandable and highlight the importance of this threefold process of knowledge, Guru Nanak has used the metaphor from Hindu mythology where it is told that this earth is supported by or standing on the horns of a bull. According to Hindu scriptures, in every world cycle, that is, in every cycle of creation and destruction, all mortal beings have to pass through four *Yugas* named *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dwapara Yuga*, and *Kali Yuga*. It is believed that in *Satya Yuga*, *dharam* was intact on its four legs (as represented by a bull); in *Treta Yuga*, one leg of *dharam* was gone and it was standing on its three legs; in *Dwapara Yuga*, only two legs remained and two were gone; and in *Kali Yuga*, only one leg of *dharam* remains and three are gone (according to this myth the present age is the age of *Kali Yuga*). Appropriating this metaphor, the Guru says that “through the knowledge gained by contemplation, the seeker finds illumination that this bull is *Dharam*, which is born of compassion and contentment of mind that holds creation together. Whoever realizes this truth shall be enlightened.” To elaborate further, Guru Nanak rhetorically asks “how heavy the load is under which this bull stands. If the earth extends beyond the farthest limits, on what support does all this rest (if it is a bull on whose horns the earth is standing)? The created beings are countless with their hues and names. Who may calculate God’s might and the beautiful forms created by it” [2]? In short, according to Sikh belief, *Satya Yuga* or *Kali Yuga* does not happen at a particular time or period. There is *Satya Yuga* whenever a person or persons behave under the inclination of virtues like truthfulness (*sati*), contentment (*santokh*), knowledge (*gyan*), altruism (*parupkar*), goodness, etc. *Kali Yuga* happens when people work or behave under the inclination of lust (*kaam*), anger (*krodh*), greed (*lobh*), attachment (*moh*), avarice (*trishna*), and egoism (*ahankaar*). *Satya Yuga* ultimately means to work according to the higher spiritual principle of *dharam*. *Dharam* is intact or on its four legs when people follow the qualities as described above. It loses its wholeness when vices dominate a person’s behavior or the

behavior of the people as a whole. So *dharam* is the highest divine principle which is the prop or support of this world.

Another meaning of *dharam* is to follow this higher spiritual principle to shape one's behavior, acting in accordance with this principle to cultivate in oneself virtues like truthfulness, contentment, knowledge, and altruism. The fourth Guru, Ram Das, states that "those persons who are inclined to the *Satya Yuga*, meaning a spiritually high state of mind, have contentment and are engaged in meditation of the Divine Name. These people praise God with the strength of their body and mind and attain the supreme bliss because knowledge of Divine attributes is lodged in their hearts. Because of this boon of knowledge, they are blessed and get reputed as men of God. Within and without, they feel solely the presence of God – none other. This is the state of *Satya Yuga* when *dharam* is intact on its four legs". [3] According to Sikhism, *dharam* as the highest spiritual principle transcends the boundaries prescribed by a particular faith or religion and does not come into rituals prescribed by any such faith. Instead, the Creator (God) is immanent in His creation. The human being is truly born when God puts His light in the human being. So the Guru asks us to ever recite and remember the Divine Name. The example cited by Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha for the *dharam* as the sacred law which holds the universe is from "*Swayyas*" by Guru Arjan Dev. Here, "the Divine Name is considered the *dharam*, the highest principle which saves the world in this age of *Kali Yuga*. This way of *naam dharam* has been manifested by Guru Nanak, servant of God, the divine preceptor". [4]

In Sikhism, *dharam* has also been viewed as righteousness and justice. Guru Ram Das says that "God is pervasive and that He is the only reality and the judge. He chastises and reject those who engage in falsehood, while those with pure hearts are exalted and united with Him. The Guru asks the human beings to come and join in praising the name of God who has given victory to the righteous and chastised evildoers". [5] Guru Ram Das further states that "the holy preceptor is the soil of righteousness, such that as one sows, such shall be his rewards. The preceptor's disciples have sown

*Amrita* and they are granted the fruit of *Amrita* by the Lord. Their faces will glow here and they shall get the robe of honor at the holy portal. Some are spurious, doing evil always and as their deeds are such is their recompense. As the holy preceptor shall cast his glance, the self-seekers shall be exposed". [6] Guru Arjan Dev asks "human beings to serve those persons who are devoted to the Divine Name because in their company they will also get devoted to the name. Because of that they shall abide in joy in this world and it will accompany them to the next world". The Guru further advises his followers "to erect one's home of truth and righteousness, fixing unshakable pillars of faith and taking shelter with God who gives succor to the humble in this world". [7] Guru Arjan Dev states that "noble beings achieve the great objective of life by meditation on the name, and as human beings engage with righteousness the world in which they live is purified". [8] Sikhism is an all-inclusive religion, in which every Sikh asks for the good of humanity while doing supplication (*ardaas*) to God. The basic teachings of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* advises man to ever remember God so that man can cultivate Godlike qualities such as truth, compassion, and love for the creation of God and consider all the human beings as his or her brothers being the creation of the same Almighty God, the Father of all. According to Sikhism a person becomes as the Lord when he serves "*jaisa sevai taiso hoy*." Guru Arjan Dev asks his followers "to contemplate the Lord in all times, while rising and sitting, and with this, all affliction shall be annulled, and all foes shall turn friends. Such a person will not have enmity toward anybody, and his heart will be purified. This is the noblest in all actions and holiest among all creeds. By contemplating God, one will be saved and the burden of multiple births will be casted off". [9]

When the word *dharam* is used with the word *karam* in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, it refers to the actions related to any religious tradition or creeds. In Hinduism, for example, to make offerings to the different gods (*devtas*), to bathe at holy places like the River Ganga, or to make other holy pilgrimages are the religious actions that sometimes become understood as strict rules. In Sikhism,



religious performances without the cultivation of ethical virtues and remembering God or reciting His name are not of any worth. But if one remembers God who has created this world, the Father of all, then one can attain spiritual unity with Him. Guru Nanak Dev addresses the *Pandit* who guides the people for the performance of religious rituals according to *Shastras*, saying that “while performing religious actions, like undertaking pilgrimages and fasting, man still keeps worldly desires and expectations in mind – and because expectations and desires are forgers of mind, by extension, so are ritual actions. The *Pandit* is engaged in rituals, but these do not lead to bliss; bliss comes through self-realization, that is, the realization of the source of all creation. The actions done under the influence of attachment to *maya* do not remove duality from the mind”. [10] Guru Nanak asks rhetorically that “if one does not know the way of rituals or creeds, how may he find the way to spiritual liberation? He answers that liberation comes through realization of the shabad (the word) under the guidance of the preceptor, by contemplation of the name day and night”. [11] Guru Amar Das further clarifies this notion by citing an example from the *Puranas*. He says that “Prehlad, the son of the demon Hirankashyap, did not take to ritual performance nor did he read any scriptures which explain how to perform such rituals or to control one’s sense organs. However, he did not love any other than God. By contact with the preceptor, he was rendered pure, and duality was removed from his mind. He meditated on the name and his study and learning was the One God”. [12] According to the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, “the recitation and realization of the Divine Name is the highest and rarest of all ritual pieties”. [13]

In Sikhism, *dharam* also means “duty,” especially in the sense of religious duty. According to the *Shastras*, society is divided into four *Varnas* – *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra* – and every *Varna* was assigned different duties. It is the duty of a *Brahman* to study and teach scriptures and to perform religious functions; *Kshatriyas* are to protect the country from external and internal dangers; *Vaishyas* are to produce for the society and trade; and *Shudras* are to

serve the upper three sections of society. During Guru Nanak’s time, India was ruled by the *Pathans*, until Babar invaded India. Guru Nanak raised his voice against the atrocities committed by these rulers against their subjects. At the same time, he reminded people of their duties as prescribed by their religion. Though Sikhism itself is against the division of society based on varanashrama dharam, Guru Nanak made people conscious of their duties toward the broader society. “Without adherence to duty, the whole world is reduced to the same caste of wrong doers, and the state of dharam is gone”. [14] According to Sikh philosophy, “what pleases God is pure doing and truthful performance of religious duty because all treasures of merit lie with God. He is the Lord and humans are only to supplicate to Him”. [15]

*Dharam* as one of the four *purusharthas*, or objectives of human life as given in the *Shastras*, is also referred to in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, though Sikhism does not prescribe them as such. According to Hinduism these *purusharthas* are *dharma*, or religious duty; *artha*, or wealth; *kama*, or desire; and *moksha*, or salvation. Guru Ram Das says that “for those humans in whose hearts the Divine Name is lodged, all anxiety is ended; they have attained all boons and merits of pious acts. By meditation on and praising of the Divine Name, they have attained the spiritual desires of their hearts. Their foul thinking and folly are gone, and they have attained illumination through devotion to the Divine Name”. [16] The concept of *dharam* is also defined very briefly by Guru Arjan Dev as follows: “of all *dharams*, the most exalted is the contemplation of the Divine Name, and of all rituals, the purest action” – which means one should contemplate the Divine Name and do the purest action under the guidance of the Divine Name. [17]

*Dharam Khand*: In Sikh scripture, the *baani*, the ideal placed before the seeker is to be “*sachiar*”: one who has attained the realization of the self, the ultimate reality, the source of its origin, and the ultimate source of all creation. “*Sach*” is a quality of God as well as a quality to be achieved by the seeker or the moral agent; the seeker is to be like Him in order to acquire this

quality. The personality of the seeker viewed by the Sikh Gurus is ever dynamic, so that the seeker must be ever active toward his goal under the guidance of the shabad of the Guru. In this case, knowledge and effort both go side by side, and the seeker is to go stage by stage in ascending order. These stages have been explained in the “*Japuji*” by Guru Nanak; the first stage, or *khand*, is called “*dharam khand*.”

At this first stage of knowledge in the first step toward his journey of self-realization, the seeker has an ordinary experience of nature. He observes natural phenomena and becomes aware of the natural laws working therein. This is the knowledge related to sense perception. In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the term used for this realm of perceptual knowledge is “*dharam khand*,” or the realm of righteousness action. Here the seeker observes “many the elements of water, air, fire; many the *Shivas*, *Krishnas* (Him admire). Many the *Brahmans* who create the beings of various forms, colors, kinds. Many the fields of action, many the mounts of gold, many the *Dhruvas* receiving instructions (at His threshold). Many the *Indras*, suns, moons, many the stars, many the earthly regions, many the *Sidhas*, *Budhas*, *Nathas*, many the goddesses of myriad kinds. Many the gods, demons, sages, many the Jewels born of oceans. Many the norms of life, many the forms of speech, many the devotees of spirit, many the kings of kings. Many many are the forms of beings”. [18] Here, knowledge is derived from sense experience. The references have been taken from Hindu mythology to indicate two things: first, that the creation of God is countless and there is not only one *Shiva* or *Idra* – His creation is beyond measure; and second, all these gods or goddesses are not independent forces but are in fact part of nature created by God. The renowned scholar on Sikh ethics, late Dr. Avtar Singh, while referring to *dharam khand* observes:

“when we come to Sikhism, dharam appears to signify both the meanings, namely the laws according to which the objects of nature are working in their rhythmic uniformity, as well as performing the function as exemplified in the socially approved precepts. The common element

may thus be seen as the performance of function which is given a moral context. In the stanza where the *dharam khand* occurs in the *Adi Granth* the background is that of various forces of nature working with regularity. Days, nights, seasons, dates, days of the week, air, water, heat, nether regions, and other events are mentioned as the context in which *dharti* (the earth, from the same root *dh* from which *dharam* is also derived) is set up for the performance of one’s duty. The Guru says that there are many types of creatures and there are many ways of these creatures. Their names are numerous. Each one is viewed in terms of his actions or functions”. [19]

While clarifying and differentiating the Sikh point of view, Singh further states that “The Guru has not laid down any specific duties. It could perhaps be due to the simple reason that, as already demonstrated by the Guru, there are countless spatio-temporal possibilities in terms of social environments. It would, therefore, be impossible to lay down specific duties in each case. As Sikhism does not contribute to the idea of specific duties of castes, etc., – such as *Visesa dharma* – it leaves scope for the situational duties arising out of the peculiarities of existential situations”. [20]

*Dharamsal*: Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, in *Mahan Kosh*, describes *Dharamsal* as a noun; other words used for this are *Dharamshala* or *Dharamandir*. He defines these as follows: “(1) a place where pilgrims or visitors are provided a free lodging; (2) the religious place of the Sikhs where *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is installed, the visitor gets a free food and lodging, and where education is provided (see, *Gurdwara*); (3) the place where *dharam* is practiced; (4) and *Dharamsalia* – the priest of *Dharamsal*, the *Granthi* of *Dharamsal*”.

In the *baani* of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, *Dharamsal* has been referred to as a place of *Dharam*, where *dharam* is practiced. First of all, Guru Nanak has used this word in “*Japuji*” where it is told that this earth has been created by God Almighty to practice *dharam*, righteous action. The Guru says that” first of all He created night and day, seasons, and occasions. He also created air, water, fire, and regions. Amidst all these He fixed the earth, the place for righteous action (*dharam*). Then, in this earth, He created numerous kinds of creatures and their ways. These

creatures are of many names and are illimitable. All creatures are judged on their actions in the court of God. In His court the saints (with good actions) are the elect of God and are seated in celestial beauty marked with His approval". [21] Guru Amar Das further supports this view when he says that "God Himself has set up His throne in the firmament and nether regions. By His ordinance He created the earth as the place of righteous action. He Himself is the savior of the humble who creates and causes creation to be absorbed. He provides sustenance to all". [22]

Guru Arjan Dev has termed "*Dharamsal* as the place or temple of truth where the devotees of God sit in congregation, where he (Guru Arjan Dev) wants to do service to them and bow to them". [23] Guru Arjan Dev further refers to *Dharamsal* as "the temple of God where God's praise is chanted, holy company assembles, meditation occurs, and the grace and compassion of God are asked for". [24] It is indicated in the compositions of Bhai Gurdas that "Dharamsal was the name given to places where Gurbani was sung". [25] It was the name given to Sikh congregational places in earlier times, before such places came to be known as "*Gurdwara*." According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Dharamsal* is the place where *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is installed and was established by any one of the Sikh Gurus for preaching. From Guru Nanak to Guru Arjan Dev, this place was called a *Dharamsal*. Then Guru Arjan Dev gave the name "*Harmandir*" to the religious place at Amritsar. Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, replaced the name of *Dharamsal* with the term *Gurdwara*.

*Dharamraj*: Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha in *Mahan Kosh* has given the following meanings of the noun *Dharamrai* or *Dharamraj*: (1) the king who follows *dharam*; (2) the Creator, the wondrous God; (3) god of death, as in "*dharamrai ab kaha kraigo jou fayto sgle lekha*" (*soarth*). According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, in the *Shastras*, the god of death (*Yam*) and *Dharamraj* are one and the same – they were born to *Sangya* through *Sun*. *Yami* was also born at the same time with her brother, which means *Yam* and *Yami* are twins. The name of *Dharamraj's* kingdom (*puri city*, or residing place) is *Samyamni*, his palace is known as

*Kalichi*, his throne is named *Vichar Bhu*, and the big and heavy register (account book entrusted to Chit Gupat) is named *Agusamdhani*.

While describing the importance of the recitation of the Divine Name as singing (*gava*), Guru Nanak says that "every creation of God is lauding Him. Even *Dharamraj*, to whom people are accountable for their doings in this world according to the shastras, sings His praise at His righteous portal. *Chitra* and *Gupta*, who record the deeds of humans, are also singing His praise. The meaning applied by this is that God is the creator of all natural forces and all the gods are working under His ordinance". [26] Guru Amar Das endorses the same view when he says that "God commands *Dharamraj* to dispense true justice. The evil-minded fallen into duality are subject to *Dharamraj's* decision, which means they are to bear the punishment given by him. The spiritually inclined meditate on the name of God, who is the treasury of noble attributes and for whom there is no equal. *Dharamraj* himself serves such people. That God is wondrous who has ennobled them". [27] Guru Arjan Dev reminds the humans that the "body becomes blind and get involved in lust, wrath, and attainment because of worldly desires. *Dharamraj* is always on man's head, but still man consumes *maya* poison with delight". [28] Man is reminded to do righteous actions only because he has to bear the fruit of his doings.

*Dharmayudh*: In *Mahan Kosh*, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha defines *dharmayudh* as the war which is fought to keep the principles of righteousness as central; it is a war in which no guile, deceit, fraud, and falsehood are used while fighting. Though there is no direct reference available in the primary scripture of Sikhism, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, there are many couplets which indicate that man should fight for righteousness and justice. During the time of Guru Nanak Dev, the Mughal emperor Babur attacked India. Guru Nanak raised his voice against his atrocities on the Indian public. In Sikh tradition, the Sikh Gurus represent the house of Baba Nanak as "*Babe ke*" in their fight against the Mughal atrocities; the Mughals are represented as "*Babar ke*" and became the symbol of atrocities against Indian

subject. The first indication toward this war for the principles of righteousness is evident in Guru Nanak's compositions when he says, "If you seek to engage in the game of love then step into my street with thy head placed on thy palm, while embarking upon this path sacrifice head ungrudgingly." [29] In this verse, "head" is the symbol of ego and has both spiritual and social aspects. The head's spiritual concern is to submit fully to the will of God. Guru Nanak states in *Japuji* that *haumai*, or ego, is the wall between God and man and is a hurdle to attain the status of *sachiar* (the truthful). So it is necessary to fight egoism and other vices which are the obstacles on the spiritual path to union with God. The social aspect indicated here is that one has to fight for the righteousness, freedom, justice, and self-respect for all; one has to sacrifice one's head for this purpose. According to Guru Arjan Dev, *halemi raj* (gentle governance) is the purpose to be attained. Its concerns are spiritual as well as social or worldly. He says that "now the ordinance of the gracious Lord is promulgated. No one shall cause hurt to any other. Now all mankind shall abide in peace and the governance shall be gentle. He further says that he is the champion of the Lord and his tassel is held high. The champions are assembled there and the Lord Himself is witnessing the wrestling. Trumpets and drums are playing, champions are moving around in the arena. He (the Guru) has overthrown five wrestlers and the Master has stroked his back". [30] Five wrestlers here represent the five sources of evil which indicate toward spiritual achievements to conquer them. *Halemi Raj*, or gentle governance, indicates social concern. Bhagat Kabir says that "the kettledrum was struck in the seat of superconsciousness and the weapon hit the target of the heart. As the hero has taken the field, now is the occasion to wage battle. He is the true hero who fights in defense of the humble. He is cut limb after limb but does not flee the field". [31] This also indicates spiritual fight as well as the fight for righteousness. This life is a battlefield. No one can be careless here. To fight evil forces, one should keep ready oneself. It is the duty of the brave to fight oppression and protect the weak and poor.

## References

1. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 3. mannai magu na chalai panthu. Mannai dharam seti sanbandhu
2. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 3. dhaolu dharamu daya ka putu. Santokhu tthapi rakhya jinni suti
3. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 445. satijug sbhu santokhu srira pag chare dharam dhyan jio
4. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1387. balio chrugu andhar mahi sabh kli oudhri eik naam dharam
5. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 89. hari jali thali mahiali bharpu duja nahi koi
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 302. satiguru dharati dharam hai tisu vichi jeha ko bije teha phal pae
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 320. tisai srevahu pranio jis dai naun palai
8. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1425. naam dhiyeini sajna janam padarth jiti. nanak dharam ayise chavhi kito bhavanu punit
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 895. outhat baithaq hari japu. binsai sagal santapu
10. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 635. aasa mansa bamdhnai bhai karam dharam bamdhkari
11. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 67. dait putu karam dharam kishhu sanjam na parhai duja bhaou na janhai
12. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 437. karam dharam ki sar na janhai surati mukati kiou payei
13. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 298. sagal dharam pavitar isnanu. Sabh mahi ouchi bsekh giyan
14. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 663. khatriya ta dharamu shhorhiya maleshh bhakhiya gahi
15. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 180. jo tudhu sio nirmal karama. Jo tudhu bhavai so sachu dharama
16. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 443. Jin antre ram naam vasai tin chinta sabh gavaya ram. sabhi artha sabhi dharama milai mani chindya phalu paya ram
17. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 216. sarab dharam mahi sreshat dharam. Hari ko naam japu nirmal karam
18. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 7. dharam khand ka eho dharam
19. Dr Singh A (2009) The ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 215
20. Ibid, p. 216
21. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 7. rati ruti thiti var. pavanh panhi again patal. tis vichi dharti thapi rakhi dharamsal
22. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 785. aape takhatu rchayon aakas patala. hukme dharati sajionu sachi dharamsala
23. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 73. main badhi sachu dharamsal hai. gursikha lahada bhali kai
24. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 248. mohan tere sohani duar jiou sant dharamsala
25. Bhai Gurdas, varan, S.G.P.C. Amritsar (1/27). ghari ghari andar dharamsal hovai kirtanu sada visooa
26. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 347. gavanu tudhano paonhu panhi baisantar gavai raja dharam duare
27. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 38. dharamrai no hukamu hai bahi sachu dharamu bichari
28. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 178. asa bandhi murakh deh. kam krodh laptio asneh

29. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412. jaou taou prem  
khelanh ka chaou. siru dhari tali gali meri aaou
30. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 74. hunhi hukamu hoya  
miharvanh da
31. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1105. gagan dmama bajio  
prio nisanai ghao

---

## Dhyana

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Dialectic

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Diaspora

- [Migration, Sikh](#)
- [Transnationalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Diaspora (and Globalization)

Darshan S. Tatla<sup>1</sup> and Verne A. Dusenbery<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

<sup>2</sup>Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN, USA

## Synonyms

[Sikhs abroad](#); [Transnationalism](#); [World religion](#)

## Definition

The dispersion of Sikhs and Sikhism beyond India in the colonial and postcolonial period, and the consequences thereof.

## The Sikh Diaspora and Globalization

### Global Flows of Sikhs and Sikhism

The Sikh religion arose first in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, but its followers today live widely dispersed across the globe. While most contemporary Sikhs continue to be of Punjabi ancestry, it is important to recognize that Sikhism is today truly a world religion, not simply a “parochial religion” confined to Punjab or to Punjabis. In becoming a world religion, the emergence of a Sikh diaspora with increasing wealth, education, and skills has played a major role. Moreover, the new generation of Sikhs in overseas locations has influenced how Sikhism is understood and practiced by its adherents globally. Interestingly, some non-Punjabis in the West have also been drawn to the Sikh way of life, despite the fact that Sikhism is a non-proselytizing religion. And contemporary Sikh practices continue to be influenced by interaction with other religious and cultural traditions.

The Sikh tradition and contemporary Punjabi cultural mores celebrate leaving home in search of a better life. Sikh popular stories of the life of the founder, Guru Nanak, recount his four *udasis* – travels in the late fifteenth century from central Punjab to the east and west, north and south, to spread his divinely inspired message in all corners of the known world. Sikhs often emphasize the ecumenical nature of their religion and its key text, the *Adi Granth* or *Guru Granth Sahib*, which contains the divinely inspired poetry of Hindus, Muslims, and other non-Sikhs. And they recount the cosmopolitan makeup of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of pre-colonial Punjab. Moreover, Sikhs have not been constrained by caste prohibitions on overseas travel and believe, following the pronouncement of the tenth and last human Guru, Gobind Singh, that wherever five Sikhs gather in the presence of the *Adi Granth*, there too resides the eternal Guru. Thus, there is among Sikhs an historical and discursive tradition of openness to experiences and to life as a Sikh beyond Punjab. [14, 15]

As a consequence, among the various peoples of the Indian subcontinent, Sikhs are



distinguished by their high level of migration and settlement abroad. Although few reliable statistics are available, it is estimated that of nearly 23 million Sikhs worldwide, over 20 million live in India (including over 15 million in the contemporary Indian state of Punjab) and roughly 2 million live outside India. These demographic figures suggest a couple of important facts: (a) there are today more Sikhs than Jews in the world, and (b) Sikhs are overrepresented among India's overseas population (and are a highly "visible" minority, given the symbolic turban worn by many male and some female Sikhs).

Moreover, the importance of Sikhs living outside India is underlined by the fact that the history of Sikh emigration from the Punjab and their destinations and settlement across the globe has been quite different from the rest of Indian emigration abroad. The preponderance of Sikh settlement in three major Western countries – namely, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States – illustrates this distinguishing characteristic. In the United Kingdom, almost half of the total Indian population consists of the Sikhs; while the Sikh settlement in North America is much older than that of other Indian immigrants and remained predominant until the 1970s when the proportion of Hindu migrants became progressively larger.

However, the emergence of the Sikh diaspora is of relatively recent historical origin, through specific circumstances of the colonial era as Punjab was merged into the British Indian empire. Starting in the late nineteenth century, successive waves of migration and ongoing interaction with host societies have made the Sikhs settled in many different countries a global religious community.

### Colonial Migrations

The British takeover of Punjab was the first major impetus for the global dispersion of Sikhs. As a direct result of the colonial rule in Punjab, Duleep Singh, the youngest son of the Sikh ruler and an heir to the Punjab throne was pensioned off to England in 1854 under the treaty of annexation of the Punjab. [3] Further as the English regent in Lahore subdued most Sikh chiefs and *Sardars*, a few rebels were banished to distant places,

among them Bhai Maharaj Singh, who was exiled to Singapore in 1850, where he passed away in 1855. Punjab was one of the last provinces to be annexed; and, by this time, agency houses had sent several million Indian laborers from southern and eastern provinces to outlying British colonies. The British administrators experimented with many special policies in Punjab, especially as the Indian mutiny of 1857 necessitated wholesale reconsideration of imperial policies. The first immediate step was the reorganization of the Indian army, replacing the disloyal *poorbias* with the "martial races" of the Punjab – people of Punjab, and especially Sikhs, who had, by and large, stood by the English during the mutiny. The Punjabis' loyalty was rewarded by classifying Punjab as a province of "martial races," with Jat Sikhs from *Majha* and *Malwa* regions specially marked as the "finest material" for new regiments. The second major consequence was to bar agency houses from recruiting Punjabis for indentured labor, as Punjabi men were drafted into exclusive Sikh and Muslim regiments.

As a result, the number of Sikh soldiers increased sharply from 1858 to World War I. Several Sikh regiments fought in various war theaters, including China and the newly colonized Malaya. During World War I, nearly 100,000 Sikhs fought in the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe alongside allied forces. In contrast to the case of other Indians, it was the army route through which Sikhs were to go abroad as "imperial auxiliaries" and ultimately to settle there. [11] The usual channel was through regimental British officers who would recruit them as policemen or soldiers for overseas services. Thus, C. V. Creagh, Deputy Superintendent of Police at Sind, recommended Sikhs to accompany him when he was transferred to Hong Kong in 1866. Duly, 100 Sikhs arrived in Hong Kong as part of the colony's new police force in June 1867, perhaps the first batch of Sikhs overseas. Impressed by the service of these Sikhs, Creagh enabled further recruitment. Hong Kong saw the first overseas Sikh gurdwara (place of worship), designed and patronized by British officers, opened on 11 May 1902 with regimental ceremony. [61] Punjabi soldiers soon dominated the colony's police force,

maintaining their position until the 1950s when Chinese replaced them.

After Hong Kong, Sikhs were taken to Malaya in 1873, when Captain Speedy recruited Sikh soldiers to combat Chinese insurgency among Perak's tin mines. From there, many were subsequently drafted into other government services and formed the nucleus of state security forces following Malaya's passage into British control. [29, 41] In 1896 the Malay States Guides, numbering 900, almost all Sikh soldiers, were placed under Colonel Walker. In Penang soldiers established the *Wadda Gurdwara* in 1901. As security requirements expanded, the government started recruiting directly from the Punjab. Another contingent of policemen recruited from Shanghai and Hong Kong was sent to Thailand and Fiji. [44, 45] As army or police service was usually for 15 years, many security men would settle after completing their contract in Malaya and Hong Kong. They would also call their kin to overseas locations. Several of them tried their luck in Australia and New Zealand in the 1890s. [7, 22, 34] Some tried to settle as far away as Fiji, which also saw several hundred Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims arriving directly from Punjab in the 1890s to work in the sugarcane fields. [45]

In addition to opportunities in the Far East, more ambitious Sikhs set out to North America. The movement began in 1900, and by the end of the decade, over 10,000 Sikhs had settled on the West Coast, working on California farms, on the Pacific railways, and in the sawmills of British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington. However, the journey across the Pacific Ocean was hazardous, as most Sikhs faced increasingly restrictive immigration policies imposed by Canada and the United States. [10, 30] Canada, in particular, enacted specific laws discouraging Punjabi migration to British Columbia. This led to a major confrontation in 1914, when Gurdit Singh chartered a ship, the *Komagata Maru*, in Hong Kong and sailed it to Vancouver with 379 passengers, mostly Sikhs from the Far East, to challenge the Canadian color bar policy. [25] Due to these restrictive immigration laws and increasing racial hostility, many Punjabi men in North America felt stranded and unable to bring over their families. Looking for solutions to their

woes, they were inspired by some educated Hindu and Bengali elite to return to Punjab to organize a revolutionary association seeking an end of the British Empire. California Sikhs were joined by many from British Columbia to found the *Ghadar* (Revolution) Party, with headquarters in San Francisco, from which they published a weekly *Ghadar*, in Urdu and Punjabi. As its leaders soon gave a call to return to wage a war against British rule in India, several thousand Sikhs sailed back in 1914–1915. [37, 39]

Meanwhile, a new opportunity to go abroad came from newly annexed British colonies of East Africa. As the new project of having rail linkages between major towns of Uganda and Kenya was started, a Sindhi contractor, Jeevanjee, was deputed to recruit Punjabi labor. As a concession to the urgent need for labor, Punjab was opened to agency houses in the 1890s. [6, 36, 58] Among the recruits were *Ramgarhia* Sikh carpenters and craftsmen, nearly 3,000 of the 10,000 Punjabi men. As the railway line was completed between 1895 and 1901, some Punjabis returned, while others remigrated during the 1920s. By 1948 there were 10,663 Sikhs in Kenya, while several thousand had also settled in Uganda and Tanzania.

Thus, during the colonial era, small communities of Sikhs were planted in several of the British colonies and protectorates. Most numerous among them were those in the Far Eastern countries and East Africa, with somewhat smaller communities in North and South America. [28] Far from docile and accepting of legally dubious treatment and economic hardships as part of their fate in distant lands, Sikhs, in many places, challenged those in power and authority to address grievances leading to some memorable episodes which have become part of the Sikh diaspora's historical heritage. However, it was the decolonization process that led to a great upheaval and dislocation for the Sikh community in the Indian subcontinent and thereby directly contributed to the beginning of what may be described as the Sikh exodus to overseas destinations.

### Postcolonial Migrations

As the Indian subcontinent attained freedom from British rule in 1947, Punjab was partitioned.

Almost two-thirds of the western region of the province, with hundreds of Sikh sacred shrines (including Nankana, the birthplace of the Sikh founder), became part of the new Islamic state of Pakistan, the rest of the province becoming part of the new independent India. Punjabis were also diminished in numbers as unprecedented communal riots and ethnic cleansing accompanied Partition, killing over 250,000 Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. For several million Sikhs, migration to eastern districts meant leaving large and productive farmlands of the western region to resettle on the smaller lands of eastern Punjab with vastly diminished resources. [40] The official resettlement process, which lasted for a full decade, further exacerbated the tragic dislocation.

Uncertain, unsettled, and with shrunken fortunes, many searched for farmlands in neighboring provinces and those with trade skills headed for Delhi, while others speculated on overseas prospects. Coincidentally and fortunately for many, this unsettled period saw the opening of Western countries, especially of the United Kingdom due to an acute shortage of labor for its postwar industrial boom. Both Canada and the United States had also reversed their strict immigration rules. In the United States, passage of the Luce–Cellar Act in 1946 removed Asian Indians from the “barred zone,” while Canada also relaxed its immigration restrictions on Asians. Many farmers with small landholdings in congested areas of Doaba mortgaged their lands or pooled family resources and sailed to Britain. Emigrants from the Malwa region joined them a few years later. From the mid-1960s, Canada and the United States, with the further liberalization of their immigration policies, also became major destinations for Punjabi peasants. Educated professionals, who tended to prefer the United States, also joined in the 1970s. In the 1970s, another major destination came on the horizon as several Middle Eastern countries started importing labor for construction projects financed through petrodollar surpluses. Many Punjabi peasants and artisans flew as contract labor to Dubai, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iraq. However, most of these Punjabis were sojourners earning and saving for a couple of years, the demand for their labor

affected by the erratic political and economic conditions of the region. Only a few have made permanent homes there.

If rapid agrarian changes and political upheavals have been a constant push factor in the postcolonial Sikh emigration process, the latter reached a crisis point in the 1980s. In 1981, the *Akali Dal*, traditionally the party of the Sikh peasantry, launched a movement for the devolution of federal powers in Delhi towards the state administration of Punjab. The central government’s response was, after protracted negotiations, to send the army into the Golden Temple at Amritsar in June 1984. Officially aimed at flushing out “terrorists,” the bungled and brutal army action scorched the sacred precinct, completely destroying the *Akal Takhat*, a sacred historical building next to the inner sanctum, *Harimandir*. During the fierce fighting, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his associates were killed, while several hundred pilgrims were trapped inside the complex. Reaction to the army action was swift both inside India and abroad among overseas Sikhs. A decade-long insurrection ensued, led by several militant groups. On 31 October 1984, two Sikh bodyguards assassinated the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and as a reaction, anti-Sikh riots gripped the Indian capital, Delhi, and some north Indian cities. Hundreds of Sikhs fled to Punjab, while some Hindus left the province. Momentarily, Punjab became a safe haven and an effective Sikh homeland. However, fighting between the Indian security forces and Sikh militant groups became endemic; and security forces, given unprecedented powers, eventually crushed the Sikh rebellion. Thousands of civilians suspected of abetting terrorism were killed, while abductions, extortions, murders, and forced disappearances were widespread. [24, 59] In the process, human rights violations occurred on a large scale, and a new category of Sikh emigration was added: refugees and asylum seekers. Many Sikhs, harassed by the Indian state authorities, sought settlement abroad and were assisted by their relatives or friends from abroad. In the 1980s and 1990s, many Sikhs sought refugee status, and a few were granted political asylum, while others were handed back to Indian authorities.

Punjab's political culture and periodic instability and the Sikh peasantry's highly competitive social ethos have given rise to an incipient culture of migration. Today, every village has its connection abroad; social status has come to be defined in having kin in the diaspora. [56] Numerous travel agents in Punjab villages and towns assist with legal and illegal emigration. This flight abroad has witnessed several unfortunate incidents and scandals. One such case occurred on the Christmas night of 1996, when a Sicily-bound ship carrying over 280 illegal immigrants, the majority of them Sikhs, collided in the dark near Malta; the few who survived were never accounted for. In the last decade, educational visas via IELTS have seen several thousand young men and women going to Australia, leading to some violent encounters there, while the now preferred destination of Canada has created new social ethos in rural Punjab, with convenient reciprocal alliances and hefty dowry payments for Canadian brides or bridegrooms.

### Non-Punjabi Sikhs

Neither powerful enough to compel conversions nor finding sanction for it in Sikh theology, Sikhism has had little enthusiasm for proselytization. Consequently, most Sikhs in India and abroad can trace their ancestral roots to Punjabi forefathers who joined the Sikh Panth over the past five centuries (although some non-Muslim Sindhis also continue to revere the teachings of Guru Nanak and consider themselves *Nanakpanthis* or *sahajdhari* Sikhs). However, during Sikh rule in Punjab, some Europeans adopted the Khalsa dress to join Sikh armies, while Hindus from hinterland of India adopted Sikhism to gain favors from the ruler. Among them were the forefathers of Dyal Singh Majithia, the founder of *Tribune* in Lahore. From the late nineteenth century, Sikhism gained many converts from lower castes/classes of Punjab, who sought enhancement of their status through entry into the Sikh Panth. In overseas countries, there are no records of non-Sikh converts to Sikh faith in the early part of the twentieth century, although Teja Singh recalls one or two such converts in Canada and the United States. [54] But some non-Punjabis came to Sikhism

through intermarriages or liaisons between Punjabi men and local women (as in California, Sumatra, and Malaysia). [32, 33] And there have been a number of Sikh converts to Christianity over the years, among the most prominent and alarming was the young prince Maharaja Duleep Singh who later re-embraced his Sikh faith.

As Sikh migration to the West picked up after World War II, Europeans and North Americans came into increasing contact with their Sikh neighbors; and some venturesome Western spiritual seekers found themselves drawn to Sikhism. One of the most notable of these individual converts was the Englishwoman, Manjeet Kaur (a.k.a. Pamela M. Wylam), a long-time coeditor of the Gravesend-based *Sikh Courier*. Then, a large-scale conversion to Sikhism was facilitated by Harbhajan Singh Puri (a.k.a. Yogi Bhajan), who migrated from Delhi to North America in the late 1960s. In 1970, from Los Angeles, he launched the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) and subsequently established the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood in 1973. Combining yoga with Sikhism, he attracted a few thousand young North Americans and Europeans of various religious backgrounds and initiated them formally as Sikhs. Harbhajan Singh, claiming to have been given the title Siri Singh Sahib by Sikh authorities in Amritsar, projected himself as "the Chief Administrative and Religious Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere" to US officials and at several world religious meetings. [16, 42]

Despite limited numbers and their sometimes ambiguous and ambivalent relationship with Punjabi Sikhs in North America, the entry of these non-Punjabis into the Sikh Panth brought forth the issue of distinguishing practices that are religiously Sikh (*Sikhi*) from practices that are culturally Punjabi (*Punjabiyyat*). Such an idea of religious identity independent of ancestral homeland is increasingly meaningful to the new generations of Sikh youth born and socialized away from Punjab and figuring out how to be good Sikhs while belonging to those societies. These *Gora Sikhs* ("White Sikhs"), with distinct white turbans and dress, also added their voice to press for allowing baptized Sikh recruits into Canadian

and American armies and for exemptions for wearing the turban and other Sikhs symbols in various public and occupational settings as a religious right rather than ethnic custom.

### The Sikh Diaspora: A Demographic Profile

Of about 1.5–2 million Sikhs living today in the diaspora, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States have the largest communities, with substantial numbers living in the Far East, East Africa, Oceania, and the Gulf States, while there are a small number of Sikhs in almost every country of the world. Gathering data for the total population of Sikh diaspora is problematic, as only a few countries (Canada, Britain, Singapore, Australia) list Sikhs in their national censuses. In its 2001 census, the United Kingdom reported 336,419 Sikhs (0.5 % of the United Kingdom population of 58 million) increasing to 389,000 in 2006 mid-census survey. Among Canada's 30 million people, Sikhs constituted 278,415 (nearly 1 %), a steep rise from 147,440 in 1991; and they are expected to grow even more by the 2011 census, when they are likely to emerge as the largest component of the Sikh diaspora. For the United States, precise figures are elusive. Sikhs are counted as part of Asian Indians, who numbered 2,843,391 in 2010, a 70 % rise from 1,678,765 in 2001. The Sikh proportion of the Indian population in the United States has continued to decline from the 1960s, when Sikhs constituted a majority of "East Indians." Indeed, the first Indian religious place in the United States was the Stockton, California, gurdwara, established in 1912. As the emigration of Hindus to the United States has increased sharply, current figures for Hindu population are put at 2.2 million of 2.8 Indians, while Sikhs are estimated to be around 250,000, although higher figures are also quoted.

For the rest of the world, only rough estimates are available. It seems reasonable to assume that Europe exclusive of the United Kingdom has about 100,000 Sikhs; Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland have about 5,000–10,000 Sikhs each; while for Italy, which has seen a major increase in the last 5 years, estimates run as high as 70,000. In the

Asia Pacific region, some closer estimates can be extracted from various sources. In the 2006 census for Australia, 26,500 Sikhs were recorded, with the present figure perhaps double that number as a consequence of recent IELTS migrants. In New Zealand, Indians were numbered 42,408 in the 2001 census; Hindus are listed as 25,293, with Sikhs perhaps as many as 10,000. Sikh communities in other Asia Pacific countries are as follows: Singapore, 12,000; Hong Kong, 5,000; Malaysia, 36,000; Indonesia, 5,000; Philippines, 10,000; Thailand, 12,000; and Fiji, 1,200. In East Africa, the Sikh population has changed greatly. When Kenya gained freedom in 1960, there were 21,169 Sikhs. Most left due to policies of "Africanization." The exodus from Uganda was even more dramatic when Idi Amin expelled Asians in 1972. A majority were accepted by the United Kingdom. Today, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia together have about 10,000 Sikhs, of whom a large proportion is composed of wealthy business families. A small number of Sikhs live in Afghanistan, some turned refugees with the rise of political violence there. Russia, Ukraine, and many of other former Soviet republics as well as South American countries have a few hundred Sikhs each. These numbers do not account for the large number of transient laborers in the Middle East or for Sikh refugees, especially in Western Europe and North America; precise figures are buried under various "national" categories. A very rough table of the strength of Sikh diaspora along with the number of gurdwaras is given in the table below, with figures reliability varying from almost certainty to pure guesswork.

Overseas	Sikh population	No. of gurdwaras
United Kingdom	389,000	190
Canada	278,415	100
United States	250,000	100
Rest of Europe		
Italy	70,000	6
Germany	10,000	26
France	7,000	4
Netherlands	6,000	2
Belgium	5,000	3
Switzerland	2,500	2

(continued)



Overseas	Sikh population	No. of gurdwaras
Austria	2,794	2
Norway	3,000	2
Sweden	1,500	2
Denmark	2,500	2
Ireland	1,200	2
Asia Pacific		
Malaysia	36,000	113
Singapore	9,733	7
Philippines	30,000	15
Thailand	35,000	17
Australia	26,429	20
New Zealand	9,507	6
Hong Kong	2,000	2
Fiji	4,674	5
Indonesia	8,000	5
East Africa	30,000	30
Latin America	10,000	15
Middle East and South Asia		
Nepal	5,890	2
Pakistan	50,000	200+
Afghanistan	3,000	2
Middle East	70,000	2

Estimates based on various sources

Some demographic conclusions are worthy of note. The Asia Pacific region has a relatively stable Sikh population, except for some recent sharp increases in Australia's Sikh population due to student migration from Punjab and secondary migration from Southeast Asia. Primary migration is taking place to Europe and North America, especially of professionals and an unquantifiable number of undocumented immigrants. Canada remains the major destination, with high primary immigration and settlement of kin of those already settled; the average age of Canadian Sikhs is around 30 years, with a majority of working and reproductive age. Great Britain has almost zero primary migration; the age and family profile of United Kingdom Sikhs is fast approaching those of the host society. Of Europe, Italy has seen large migration, while remigration from old centers of settlement to Western countries, especially to the United States, is taking place. Sikh marriages networks, which are increasingly transnational, are another source for such relocation across the diaspora.

### Gurdwaras and Reproduction of Faith in the Diaspora

In order to understand the Sikh diaspora's dynamics and internal structure, it is necessary to understand the role of *gurdwaras* in overseas locations. *Gurdwaras*, as literally "the door to the Guru," have always been important sites of religious education. Most overseas gurdwaras, therefore, arrange Punjabi classes where children can learn to read *gurmukhi* and the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In many countries (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, United Kingdom, and the United States), residential camps for young Sikhs have become popular. In addition to *gurmukhi* classes, these camps provide introduction to daily lifestyle of a Sikh household, Sikh music, Sikh sports and martial arts, and religious studies.

*Gurdwaras* serve not only as religious places of worship but also as centers of social, educational, and political activities. The number of gurdwaras has increased as the population of overseas Sikhs has gone up. For early settlers, a gurdwara was a welcoming place, providing meals as well as accommodation until they could find alternative means. It was Sikh railway workers who built the first overseas gurdwara, a ramshackle building in Kilindini, Kenya, in 1892. The Hong Kong Gurdwara for Sikh policemen followed in 1902, designed by an English architect. The same year, a gurdwara was opened in Penang, also for Sikh soldiers. Canadian Sikhs built gurdwaras in Vancouver in 1907, in Abbotsford in 1911, and in Victoria in 1912. In 1911, with a generous donation by the *Maharajah* of Patiala, the first gurdwara was established in London. While there are nearly 190 gurdwaras today in Britain, Canada and the United States are not far behind with approximately 100 gurdwaras each. In all three places, compromises to gurdwara protocol accepted prudently by pioneer Sikh settlers, such as the use of chairs in the meeting hall and barehead attendance, have been largely rejected in favor of orthopraxy.

By the mid-1970s, *gurdwaras* were increasingly managed by *Amritdhari* (baptized) Sikhs. The *Amritdharis*, who constitute the core of *Khalsa Panth*, share the faith with *Sahajdharis* (literally, slow adaptors) and *Monas* (the clean-

shaven), who constitute a majority in the diaspora. An elected body chosen by adult male and female Sikhs of the local area manages most gurdwaras, although some gurdwaras have restricted memberships. The management committees provide a base for aspiring community leaders and a place to honor to receive dignitaries from the host society and Punjab. The prestige and income of major *gurdwaras* has meant that elections to management committees are keenly contested; historically, elections at the Ross Street gurdwara in Vancouver, the Richmond gurdwara in New York, and the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Southall have been watched with keen interest.

The historical evolution of management committees among Sikh settlers suggests their social and political organizations were based around ancestral region of origin. Thus, *gurdwara* management committees in the Far East were based upon *Majha* versus *Malwai* factions; later in North America, a pattern of *Doaba* and *Malwa* factions emerged who competed with each other while offering support for common causes too. In Britain and Canada, early gurdwara managers were much exercised by *Doaba* and *Malwa* affiliations, but as the new generation has replaced the older managers, this organizational style has been replaced either by contemporary Punjabi political factions or in more recent years by patterns of religious decision-making common in other religious traditions (e.g., “orthodox”/“modernist”).

Daily routines within a *gurdwara* are remarkably similar across the diaspora locations. At the center of worship is the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred book containing the Word. The early morning starts with *asa di var* and is followed by the standard community prayer, *Ardas*. The day ends with *rehras* and *kirtan sohila* in the evening. On weekends, at large gurdwaras, *ragis* (hymn singers), who lead *gurbani kirtan* (musical recitation of verses from the *Guru Granth*), are followed by *dhadis* (traditional bards), who narrate heroic tales from Sikh history, and *kathakar*, who provide commentary on Sikh scripture. *Langar* (communal meal from an attached kitchen) is served to the congregation and is open to any person who might wish to partake. Various ceremonies are conducted within the

gurdwara: child naming ceremonies, marriages solemnized through the *anand* ceremony as the couple seeks blessing from the *Guru Granth* in the presence of relatives and friends, baptism into the *Khalsa* through the *amrit* ceremony, and rituals associated with death. Sikhs in the diaspora are cremated; and, increasingly, their ashes are taken to Kiratpur, Punjab, although local rivers are also used. Traditional festivals, such as the birthday of *Guru Nanak* and *Baisakhi* (the founding of the *Khalsa*), are observed with gala shows. On *Baisakhi* day, which falls on 13 April in many cities, Sikhs take part in local street processions. In Vancouver, this is a colorful parade with music, floats, and *Bhangra* dancing involving participation by Sikhs from all over British Columbia and from neighboring provinces and states.

Although Sikh tradition imparts no special privilege to gurdwara functionaries, and lay men and lay women can conduct services at the gurdwara, almost all gurdwaras employ *granthis* (lit., one who cares for the *Guru Granth*) to maintain its daily routine and offer various services. Historically, *granthis* have come from Punjab. In the early years, many *granthis* – including *Bhagwan Singh*, an important revolutionary, and *Kesar Singh*, a famous writer – came from *Khalsa* Orphanage in Amritsar or from *Birdh Ghar* and *Ashram* for the Blind in Tarn Taran. In recent years, there has been increasing concern over whether Punjab-trained *granthis* are adequately prepared to serve in gurdwaras in the diaspora. Although Punjab has a *granthi* training college in *Gurmat College*, *Patiala*, most *granthis* brought from Punjab have little knowledge of English and are unable to impart religious teachings to new generations of Sikhs raised outside Punjab. Moreover, in the wake of 9/11, many countries have tightened immigration opportunities for religious functionaries coming from abroad. Thus, there are increasing calls for locally trained *granthis* with multilingual skills, better ability to relate Sikh teachings to non-Punjabi contexts, and the willingness to take on additional educational and pastoral roles found among religious functionaries in other religious traditions. However, in no country are there as yet locally educated Sikhs prepared to become full-time *granthis*, since their current low

status and pay conditions are such as to make it an unattractive occupation.

In several countries, gurdwaras offer, during regular services, a large video screen with transliteration and translation of hymns into modern colloquial Punjabi and into English (or other local languages) for young audiences. For a while, using an English version of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in worship was also discussed in English-speaking countries. The possibility that an English version of Sikh scriptures might be read and accorded the same status as the *Guru Granth* within the gurdwara was raised by a sympathetic British don, Dr. W. Owen Cole, [12] concerned with the lack of comprehension among younger Sikhs in the diaspora. However, his suggestion that Sikhs might substitute an English translation for worship was too much for the community to contemplate, since the properties of the sacred Word, as understood by most Sikhs, are not simply cognitive but include a physiological engagement with the *Guru*. [18] However, the issue of nurturing the Sikh tradition through the scriptural language does offer a difficult and enduring question for the coming generation of Sikhs in the diasporan locations – with local language screens of translated versions displayed being one solution that has emerged.

The role of women in running the gurdwara is very important. Indeed, much of the daily gurdwara routine is carried out by women – from upkeep of the building to reading the sacred scripture and maintaining the *langar*. However, women's representation on management committees is usually meagre, which occasionally raises the issue of women's rights and participation. With Sikh theological emphasis on gender equality in principle, in practical terms, this translates into women effectively doing the hard chores (e.g., making the *langar*, distributing *parshad*, cleaning utensils), while men dominate the decision-making process through management committees. On several occasions when two factions have contested control through lengthy legal wrangles, women have effectively managed gurdwaras until a resolution has been reached.

Another notable feature of overseas gurdwaras is that some of them have been inspired by *sants*

(“saints”). The earliest gurdwaras in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom were singularly inspired by a young Sikh visitor to the West, who came to be known as Sant Teja Singh. And today in the diaspora, there are gurdwaras exclusively maintained by other *sants*. [1, 57] Thus, Nanaksar *sants* have built several gurdwaras in Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand; and *sants* of various *deras* or *taksals* from Punjab (Bhindran Taksal, Harian-Velan, Nanaksar, Rara-Sahib, Hoti Mardan, Dhadhriwale, etc.) have made rounds of overseas Sikhs. [51] Sant Sohan Singh (1902–1972), for example, was long a popular figure in the Malacca region of Malaysia. *Gurdwaras* controlled by *sants* might have somewhat different routines – leading occasionally to adverse comments from traditional Sikhs – but are freer from management disputes and usually more observant of various religious rituals. The contribution of some *sants* to Sikh causes is also remarkable. It was a *Nanaksar* *sant*, Amar Singh, with a *gurdwara* in Wolverhampton, who inspired the establishment of first independent Sikh School in Britain. Several Sikh families may also pay obeisance to other popular deities such as Baba Goknath and other saintly figures by donating or even maintaining their shrines in Punjab. Moreover, in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Malaysia, one can find *babas* practicing sorcery, herbal therapy, magic, and occultism, and among them some Punjabi Muslim *pirs* and *hakims* of various lineages. These holy and deviously not-so-holy men usually offer their services through advertisements in Punjabi media established in these countries.

All sects of the Sikh faith – *Namdharis*, *Nirankaris*, and *Radhasoamis* – are well established in the diaspora. [57] The combined strength of these three sects is probably less than 5 % of the community. These sects are primarily maintained through support by their Punjab-based heads with regular visits to their followers abroad. Thus, the *Namdhari* chief, Jagjit Singh, has made several trips around the globe, celebrating *Baisakhi*, organizing classical music competitions, marrying couples, and giving counsel on administrative matters. The *Nirankaris*, even smaller in numbers, are often visited by their chiefs, although the growing

antagonism between *Nirankaris* and Sikhs has led to mutual suspicion and acrimony at some places. *Radhsoamis* similarly meet at special *satsangs* that they maintain throughout the world, and their head has been abroad several times.

### **Institutions, Mobilization, and Issues for the Faithful**

Historically, *gurdwaras* in the diaspora have served as points of mobilization around religious and political issues affecting the community. In Canada, the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver was for many decades the lead organization in making deputations to the Canadian government on behalf of “East Indian” interests with respect to immigration, citizenship, and voting rights. In recent decades, *gurdwaras* in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States have been critical sites for mobilizing support of Sikh rights to wear the turban, *kirpan*, and other articles of the faith in public settings and on job sites. More recently professional Sikh lobbying groups and Sikh civil rights organizations have emerged to take up such cases across the globe, while *gurdwaras* continue to provide key fundraising and manpower for collective action on behalf of the community.

One of the most consistent issues for mobilization that has emerged in Western countries is related to the Sikh turban. Case after case has arisen when Sikh males have been excluded from clubs, hotel bars, or denied jobs by industries and public organizations. Sikh pupils have been asked to remove turbans or *kirpans* (ceremonial sword) in some schools as posing “security problems” or as “nonconforming to schools” uniform dress policy. [55] For each case, there have been various forms of mobilization by local Sikhs. In United Kingdom the earliest cases were of bus drivers in Manchester and Wolverhampton seeking the right to wear their turbans while driving. In Canada, after a long and bitter contest, RCMP’s uniform policy was relaxed to recruit a turbaned Sikh in its ranks. In Canada again, Sikh veterans were barred from participation in annual war memorial celebrations until the Queen intervened. In the United States, Sikhs have challenged how security procedures put in place after 9/11 affect

turbaned Sikh travelers. The latest, well-covered dispute, involving Sikh pupils’ right to wear turbans in French schools, has drawn many protests and support from Sikhs all over the world.

Interestingly, in each Western country, Sikh leaders have had to learn new ways to present their petitions: in the United States, appealing to constitutional religious protections, in Britain appealing to Sikhs’ past association with the empire, in Canada framing it as human rights issue, and, currently, in France de-emphasizing religion. In the United States, it was the *Gora* Sikh converts who most assertively pushed the claim for religious rights exemptions for turbans, with a *Gora* Sikh becoming the first turbaned Sikh allowed into the US military. And in Britain, characteristically, it was a sant who led the campaign, taking the case of a turbaned student all the way to the House of Lords, who decided in favor of the Sikh student but only after having to resolve if Sikhs are a race or ethnic group or indeed a nation (House of Lords, *Mandla v. Lee*).

A second major issue that has exercised Sikh parents in the diaspora is the status of Punjabi. Punjabi is considered a sacred language, as the *Guru Granth Sahib* is written in Punjabi through an older linguistic style using the gurmukhi script. First-generation Sikh immigrants from Punjab invariably used Punjabi in their homes; successive generations have grown up in a bilingual environment, with the host society’s language becoming dominant through the school curriculum and education. Sikh parents are concerned about young Sikhs maintaining some competence in Punjabi. Although in each country of settlement there has been a gradual erosion of Punjabi literacy, even long-settled communities have not lost Punjabi completely. Large settlement of Sikhs in some countries has meant that a few mainstream schools have made provision for the teaching of Punjabi language and that Sikhism has been added to the religious curriculum for pupils. Of all the countries, the best provision for Punjabi language is in Britain, where pupils can sit for examination for GCSE and A levels. Since late 1970s, a steady stream of pupils has been passing such examinations, over 1,000 at GCSE level and 200+ at advanced level. [49] In Singapore,

students can now elect Punjabi as their official second language for school testing purposes, although the community has borne the cost of instruction and testing. Interestingly, a generation of Singaporean Sikh parents with rudimentary Punjabi skills has joined their children in attending these courses [17]!

A third issue which has attracted consistent mobilization is solidarity with the Punjab causes and in particular issues raised by Sikhs' political organization, the *Akali Dal*, and its allied religious body, the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC). Indeed earlier political associations abroad were very much tied to Sikhs' religious and political developments in the colonial Punjab. Thus, Sikhs in the Far East and North America formed Khalsa Diwan Societies that were directly related to Chief Khalsa Diwan in Amritsar. Then as the SGPC was formed and the *Akali Dal* launched in the 1920s many of its struggles against the colonial administration seeking resolution of particular grievances or parity with Hindus or Muslims, overseas Sikhs responded with appropriate resolutions and finance. As a symbolic gesture of solidarity, Canadian Sikhs sent a *jatha* (delegation) to participate in the *Jaito Morcha* agitation in 1924. From the 1920s onward, many developments in Punjab (such as the failure of the *Ghadar* movement and the emergence of the Communist Party and Kirti Kisan Party) engaged overseas Sikhs. In the postcolonial period, overseas Sikhs followed closely the Punjabi Suba movement, the Naxalite phase of 1960s, and then the *Dharma Yudh Morcha* of the 1980s that culminated into a tragedy of June 1984. The latter tragedy embroiled overseas Sikhs so much that the Government of India blamed "Sikh terrorism from abroad" and took measures to stem overseas Sikhs connections by "blacklisting," leading community leaders and other measures. [2, 35, 53] After almost a decade of such bans and restrictions upon Sikhs' connection with their homeland, normalcy returned. Meanwhile much of overseas Sikh political groupings continue to ally with and follow the Punjab pattern. At the same time, second- and later-generation Sikhs have been increasingly joining local political

parties in their countries of residence. In countries of large Sikh settlement, they are now part of city councils, and a few have become members of provincial assemblies. In Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom, some Sikhs have been elected to Parliament, while a Sikh, Dalip Singh Saund, was the first Asian American elected to the US Congress.

Meanwhile Sikhs have been dealing with local issues through interaction with local state and its institutions. Concern with education and Sikh religious tradition has resulted in the establishment of independent Sikh schools in Britain, Canada, Malaysia, and Thailand. Started with or without state support, these institutions provide provision for Punjabi language and religious education in an appropriate environment for young Sikh minds.

In Britain, Sikh lobbyists approached the BBC to provide more time for Punjabi language broadcasting by radio and television channels. The BBC's official patronage of Hindi-Urdu was questioned as discriminatory to Punjabi speakers who, it was argued, constitute a majority of South Asians in Britain. In Canada, Punjabi is growing so fast as a recognized second language that CBC's iconic Hockey Night in Canada is now broadcast in Punjabi! In many countries (United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Australia), there are now several radio and TV channels owned by Sikhs (e.g., Britain has Sikh TV, Sikh Channel, Sangat TV) or else hired to broadcast for Sikh viewers. In the last decade, several South Asian commercial TV channels have become available for Sikh homes in many overseas locations, among them PTC and Zee Punjabi.

As part of new global communication networks, Sikhs have created numerous websites with services ranging from informational forums, downloadable Punjabi fonts, Sikh chat rooms, and searchable scriptures (including multilingual searchable texts of the entire 1,430 page of *Guru Granth Sahib*). Several websites offer instruction in Punjabi language – that of Punjabi University is especially aimed at the Punjabi diaspora population, while another is nearing completion from the University of California Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching.



The Punjabi media of the Sikh diaspora has a long history, with the first newspapers published from Vancouver in 1907. [52] The invention of the Internet and the proliferation of websites have led to several media titles available for overseas Sikh readers, besides facilitating online reading of leading newspapers and magazines of Punjab such as *Ajit* and *Tribune*. In addition, a large corpus of Punjabi literature has been published by diaspora writers. In higher education, a number of American and Canadian universities have begun to offer Punjabi language classes; and, for many years, the Sikh studies program at UC-Santa Barbara offered a summer language and cultural tour of Punjab.

As the Sikh diaspora has forged ever closer links across the globe through modern communications, many doctrinal and organizational issues have engaged their attention through Internet websites. [23] Much passion has been spent on how to reform gurdwara administration abroad. Disputes arising from elections of management committees have increasingly gone to local legal authorities – where different judicial systems have decided such cases. Courts have heard cases ranging from dismissal or remuneration of granthis to proper procedures for electing a management team for gurdwaras. In resolving such contentious cases involving gurdwaras (most of which are registered as charitable institutions), courts have usually asked for authoritative procedures or precedents – which has meant various groups appealing to Amritsar (either to the SGPC or *Akal Takht*) to send some written documents and others arguing that the SGPC and *Akal Takht* have no authority outside of Punjab. [4] The issue of having national Sikh associations for each country has been constantly debated. Attempts to create umbrella national organizations, whether spearheaded by local Sikhs themselves or by state authorities, have generally not fared well falling victim to factionalism or to fears of co-option by the state. While Singapore's Sikh Advisory Board was able to advance Sikh collective interests for several years in the 1990s, Canada's attempts at establishing a national Sikh association were, during the same years, a failure. [19] In order to bring uniform reform in overseas gurdwara administration, the SGPC had proposed

a national body for each country and then drawing from these a global Sikh organization. This proposed overarching structure has not materialized due to various factors. However, the vacuum of formally recognized national or international Sikh leadership has meant that local governments, state authorities, and the media usually turn for the “Sikh perspective” to politicians who happen to be Sikh or to those Sikhs who claim expansive titles, such as Yogi Harbhajan Singh's assertion that he was “the Chief Religious and Administrative Authority for Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere” or Didar Singh Bains' title as head of the World Sikh Organization-USA. [20]

In making sense of their heritage, the younger generation of Sikhs in different countries has questioned many of orthodoxies and accepted opinions. A new generation of women including Gora Sikhs and second- and third-generation Punjabi Sikhs living in the diaspora are raising equality issues both at the theological and the practical level, questioning the excesses of patriarchal values within the *gurdwara* as also other structures within diasporic Sikh communities. In 2003, a deputation of Sikh women from the United Kingdom, in a symbolic gesture, arrived in Amritsar to test the equality issue, by insisting upon the right to sing hymns and take part in midnight rituals at the Golden Temple usually reserved for men. [23] This debate has further extended to social practices of “arranged marriages” and sex-determination techniques.

Online Sikh discussion groups (e.g., Sikh-Diaspora Yahoo Group) have raised such issues as the *gurdwara* protocol, relevance of the Sikh symbols (the “5K”) in overseas contexts, and Sikh positions on abortion, infanticide, divorce, and interreligious marriages. For a time, the authority of SGPC officials or *Akal Takht jathedars* in overseas Sikh affairs was also subject to much discussion. A dispute around seating arrangements for the *langar* was made an issue by two factions of a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. One faction appealed to the *jathedar* of Akal Takht, Amritsar, who issued a directive for all *gurdwaras* to follow the Punjab pattern of sitting on the ground. This led to a bitter contest when the Surrey *gurdwara* committee declined to remove

chairs provoking a violent clash and ultimately led to the defeat of managers. Since the said directive from Amritsar, a somewhat pragmatic solution has prevailed in overseas *gurdwaras*, with a mixture of chairs and tables alongside traditional facilities for serving the *langar*.

Another characteristic of life in the Sikh diaspora has also exercised many Sikhs abroad – the fact that the caste hierarchy of Punjab has been reproduced in overseas locations. Thus, one can find *Ramgarhia gurdwaras* and *Ravidasi Bhawans*. *Ramgarhia* is the name for the artisan Sikhs, many of whom have had considerable experience in East African countries, where they were the majority and dominant component of the Sikhs. In order to emphasize their distinct socio-economic status and identity, they have named *gurdwaras* under their control as *Ramgarhia gurdwaras* – while maintaining the same protocol and function within them. *Ramgarhia* Sikhs are a case of how some social groups within the Sikh society might assert themselves through naming of *gurdwaras*.

However, one social group, *Chamars*, who form the lowest Punjabi caste, deserve special mention as they present an interesting religious-cum-social identity formation process at work. Some of them have, through diasporic space and opportunities, advocated a new social identity for themselves as either a Buddhist group or a *Ravidasi* lineage. This slow demarcation from mainstream Sikhism, or de-Sikhisation process, [26] is in part stimulated by their economic success and a sharpened sense of caste discrimination by fellow Punjabis. [48, 57] A violent incident involving the murder of a *sant* from Sant Sarwan Dass Dera, Ballan, in Vienna in 2009 brought the caste issue to the fore among overseas Sikhs. Sant Sarwan Dass Dera, Ballan, as a reaction to the murder, has advocated a complete break from ambiguous Sikh–*Ravidasi* identity for its overseas followers. The *Dera* has sought replacing of the *Guru Granth* in *Ravidas Bhawans* by its newly compiled sacred book *Amar Bani Sri Guru Ravidass Ji*. While as yet, the new sacred book has not found acceptance, the issue points towards the importance of socioreligious differentiation which prevails among the Sikh diaspora too.

### The Diaspora's Role in Internationalizing Sikhism as "World Religion"

The presence of Sikhs in many countries across the globe has helped to internationalize the Sikh faith, gaining Sikhism international recognition as the youngest major world religion, alongside Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. [27] This has come as overseas Sikh associations have made conscious efforts to seek seats on international religious platforms. Thus, Sikh representatives have made their presence felt at the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago (2003); the European Council of Religious Leaders in Oslo (2003) and Berlin (2008); the Parliament of the World Religions in Barcelona (2004), Melbourne (2009), and Montreal (2011); the United Nations Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace in New York (2005); and at many other recent and past interreligious gatherings.

The 1999 tri-centenary celebrations of the founding of the Khalsa saw much interest in the community's artistic heritage. A magnificent exhibition, *Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms*, was assembled at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, with many items from the Queen's private collections; and this exhibition subsequently travelled to several countries. [50] The US-based Sikh Foundation, under the patronage of Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, also helped organize a Sikh exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, and has financed a permanent Sikh section at the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco. The Smithsonian Museum is now planning a Sikh gallery, and the UK Punjab Heritage Association is aiming to preserve Sikh- and Punjab-related arts and collections in the British Museum and various libraries in the United Kingdom.

Successful Sikh professionals and businessmen have established endowments and contribute funds enabling some leading universities in the West to offer Sikh Studies courses and create teaching positions. The Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada helped finance the first permanent chair of Sikh and Punjabi studies at the University of British Columbia in 1988. A second Sikh studies chair, at the University of Michigan, was financed largely by local Sikhs; and the Bindra

family endowed a chair at Hofstra University in New York. In 2000, Nishkam Sewak Jatha of Birmingham, England, funded a lectureship at the University of Birmingham. The Sikh Foundation has financed several courses at the University of California, Berkeley, and Columbia University and has endowed named chairs of Sikh and Punjabi studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara; University of California, Riverside; University of California, Santa Cruz; and California State University, East Bay. As a result, a new generation of Sikh scholars in the West is emerging with the potential to undertake serious academic work. Besides launching the *International Journal of Punjab Studies* in 1994 and *Sikh Formations* in 2000, innovative research has been carried on the compilation of sacred scriptures, the Singh Sabha Movement, Sikh feminism, theoretical models for understanding contemporary Punjab politics, and the contours of Sikh nationalism.

The diaspora contribution to Sikh liturgical music is also becoming quite notable. Sat Kartar Khalsa, a follower of Yogi Harbhajan Singh, has recorded melodies from the sacred scriptures. The Malaysian-born Dya Singh from Australia has combined the Sikh musical tradition with a variety of spiritual and ethnic traditions and has performed internationally accompanied by Dheeraj Shrestha and Andrew Clemont. Chris Moony Singh, an Australian convert from Singapore, is engaged in reviving the art of *rehab* hymn singing.

Pilgrimage to holy shrines and historic sites, especially to *Nankana* (the birthplace of Guru Nanak), has become an established diasporic practice. Every November over 2,000 Sikhs from various countries gather for prayers at Nankana Sahib and visit other historic shrines in Pakistan Punjab including Maharajah Ranjit Singh's Fort in Lahore. Hemkunt in the Himalayas and Hazur Sahib in Maharashtra in South India are also gaining popularity as pilgrimage sites. In Great Britain, Sikhs pay homage to Maharajah Duleep Singh's Elveden Estate in Suffolk. There is interest in preserving the *Ghadar* inheritance in San Francisco. In Canada, the Abbotsford gurdwara has gained national historic

status as the oldest extant *gurdwara* in North America, while memories of Komagata Maru episode and the sacrifice of Mewa Singh are commemorated in Vancouver *Gurdwaras* and belatedly by public acknowledgement of the Canadian government. In Singapore, a *samadh* (death memorial) to Bhai Maharaj Singh is being preserved as part of Sikh diaspora heritage.

Finally, Sikh diaspora philanthropy has long been directed to the needy in Punjab and elsewhere. Sikh benevolence funds have gone to educational institutions, hospitals, and charities. Early twentieth century donations by the Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver and the Hong Kong and Malaysian Sikhs to Chief Khalsa Diwan and other religious organizations were substantial, as reports in *Khalsa Samachar* testify. Khalsa College (Amritsar), *Bhai Ditt Singh Kanya Pathshala*, *Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya* (Ferozepore), and the Khalsa School (Kairon) all received overseas funds; and East African Sikhs donated liberally to Sikh educational conferences and to *Ramgarhia* College (Phagwara). A memorial to *Ghadar* heroes in Jalandhar City was built through overseas funds, while, in the 1920s, the families of many interned *Ghadar* activists were supported by the Desh Bhagat Parvarik Sahaik Kmeti under the leadership of Wasakha Singh. Such funds were usually channeled through granthis, sants, or other visiting intermediaries.

Appeals for donations to religious causes and charities appear regularly in the Punjabi media. A modern hospital and nursing college at Dhahan Kaleran, started by a Canadian Sikh, Budh Singh Dhahan, was funded through donations secured from Sikhs all over the world. A hospital at Sarabha, a women's college at Sang Dhesian, Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College in Nawanshahar, Guru Gobind Singh College in Jandiala, and a model village project in Kharaudi are just some examples of recent Sikh diaspora philanthropy in Punjab. Amritsar, as the symbolic center of the faith, has attracted generous donations. In 1995, the *Nishkam Sewak Jatha* of Britain took the responsibility of renewing the golden plates of Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple) with donations from across the diaspora. Hundreds of plaques in the Golden Temple

complex testify to the diaspora's donations. Many Punjabi village gurdwaras have a room built by its foreign son or daughter. Extensive repairs to historic shrines in Pakistan have been undertaken through diaspora funds. [21]

As the communities have prospered, some diasporan Sikhs have established formal charitable and humanitarian organizations. In several countries where Sikhs now live, there are now Sikh nongovernmental organizations and private voluntary organizations supporting local causes and responding to global appeals for help. Organizations like United Sikhs in the United States, Khalsa Aid in the United Kingdom, and Sikh Najuwan Sabha in Malaysia are all staffed by locally born or raised Sikhs gathering resources for humanitarian causes and advocating on behalf of human rights.

### **Conclusion: Impact of Local Society, Punjab, and the Emergence of Global Sikhism**

Through a century and half of migration, natural increase, and even conversion, Sikh communities outside India have come to form a substantial proportion of the global Sikh population. And despite different settlement histories on various continents, Sikhs in most places have maintained their religious distinctiveness and gained some measure of public recognition as a local religious minority, with Sikh politicians elected to public office in many countries of residence. Yet each Sikh community has evolved its local characteristics and relations with the host society and its institutions. [5, 13] Lacking a centralized authority structure, Sikhs in different localities, taking guidance from the *Guru Granth* (the sacred text) and the *Guru Panth* (the collectivity), have been relatively free to pragmatically interpret their religion at the congregational level, operating in many cases on personal alliances as against abstract ideas of the collective good of the community. The net result is that despite local, sectarian, and national influences, Sikhs have been comfortable in developing hybrid identities; thus they claim themselves as Sikh Americans, Sikh Canadians, British Sikhs, Malaysian Sikhs, and so on. In Punjab one can see Canadian or American flags on Safaris driven by visiting Sikhs.

At the same time, the Sikh diaspora's relationship with Punjab has undergone a radical transformation from the late nineteenth century to the present. Punjab remains the Sikh holy land, the birthplace of the religion, and the site of its most sacred shrines. And, for most Sikhs, it is also an ancestral homeland, the birthplace of their ancestors. For Sikh sojourners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was also a place to which most planned to return. But in the post-1947 era, Punjab has not necessarily been a place to which Sikh emigrants plan to return to live and die. With Partition, a whole generation of Sikhs was made homeless, with memories of massacres and disruption imprinted on their minds. A later generation in the diaspora watched the tragic events of 1984 on television screens as the Indian army invaded the most sacred shrine of their faith. As a consequence, Sikhs living outside India were forced, for the first time in a century of overseas settlement, to define more precisely their relationship with the Punjab and consequently their attitude towards the postcolonial Indian polity. Although Sikhs living in different nation-states responded differently, this "critical event" brought the scattered Sikh communities into a more cohesive and politically conscious community, transforming a secure and confident minority into what one social scientist has termed a "victim diaspora". [46] As a consequence, there has been intense debate about June 1984 and the future of the community through various channels. [2, 35] Some Sikhs have taken the position that only a Sikh polity, an independent Sikh homeland, could ensure the protection of Sikh interests, while others have argued that as a paradigmatic transnational community, Sikhs require no particular anchorage of a homeland or state. [8, 9, 11, 38, 43, 47, 53]

The fact that Sikhs are everywhere, a religious minority – both in India and in the diaspora – has, however, meant that Sikhs have become particularly attentive to how they have been treated in different countries of residence. The communication and transportation revolutions of recent decades have made it possible for globally dispersed Sikhs easily to compare notes on their treatment and to mobilize rapidly across national boundaries to support one another's local causes.

Thus, for example, as the French government banned “ostentatious religious symbols” in public schools, Sikhs across the diaspora quickly mobilized in support of French Sikh claims for exemption for the turban. Indeed, the Sikh civil rights group, United Sikhs, itself a response to mistaken identity attacks on American Sikhs in the aftermath of 9/11, now publishes an annual *Global Sikh Civil and Human Rights Report* documenting religious discrimination faced by Sikhs in different countries so as “to gauge the problems faced by a community that is without borders”. [60]

Contemporary globalization has meant that goods, capital, people, images, and ideas circulate more readily and easily between and among globally dispersed Sikhs. Sikh brides and grooms, travelling musicians and religious personages, Internet sites and publishing houses, humanitarian groups and civil rights organizations, scholarly conferences and sporting competitions all connect Sikhs across nodes of the diaspora and back to Punjab. One consequence has been that the Sikhs in the diaspora, particularly wealthy and educated Sikhs living in the West, have become what one scholar termed “the new patrons”, [31] playing an increasingly important role in defining what it means to be a Sikh and how Sikhism is coming to be understood and practiced in the twenty-first century. While Punjab is the birthplace of Sikhism, the land where the faith was founded and the home to hundreds of historic shrines associated with the community’s history, the Sikh religion is today vibrantly alive and growing in various places all across the globe, creating new historic makers, markers, and memories that will be touchstones of global Sikhism in years to come.

## Cross-References

- [Amritsar](#)
- [Dalip Singh, Maharaja](#)
- [Hukumnama](#)
- [Khalistan](#)
- [Pilgrimage \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Punjab](#)
- [Punjabi Language](#)
- [Sants](#)

- [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)
- [Sikh Studies](#)
- [Sikhi](#)

## References

1. Anand GS, Peter B, Paul SS (2008) Khalsa Jatha British Isles 1908–2008. The Central Gurdwara, London
2. Axel B (2001) The nation’s tortured body; violence, representation and the formation of the Sikh diaspora. Duke University Press, Durham
3. Bance P (2009) Sovereign, squire and rebel: Maharajah Duleep Singh and the heirs of a lost kingdom. Coronet House Publishing, London
4. Barrier NG (2004) Authority, politics, and contemporary Sikhism: the Akal Takht, the SGPC, Rahit Maryada, and the law. In: Singh P, Barrier NG (eds) Sikhism and history. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 194–229
5. Barrier NG, Dusenbery V (eds) (1989) The Sikh Diaspora: migration and experience beyond Punjab. Chanakya, Delhi
6. Bhachu P (1985) Twice migrants: east African Sikh settlers in Britain. Tavistock, London
7. Bhatti R, Dusenbery V (2001) A Punjabi Sikh community in Australia: from Indian sojourners to Australian citizens. Woolgoolga Neighbourhood Centre, Woolgoolga
8. Bhogal B (2011) Monopolizing violence before and after 1984: governmental law and the people’s passion. *Sikh Form Relig Cult Theory* 7(1):57–82
9. Brass P (1991) Ethnicity and nationalism: theory and experience. Sage, Delhi
10. Buchignani N, Doreen I, Srivastava R (1985) Continuous journey: a social history of South Asians in Canada. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto
11. Cohen R (2007) Global Diasporas: an introduction, 2nd edn. Routledge, London
12. Cole WO (1982) The settlement of Sikhs in the United Kingdom: some possible consequences. *Punjab Past Present* 16–17(32):421–430
13. Dusenbery VA (2008) Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi
14. Dusenbery VA (2008) A Sikh ‘Diaspora’? Contested identities and constructed realities. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 92–117
15. Dusenbery VA (2008) ‘Nation’ or ‘World Religion’? Master narratives of Sikh identity. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 118–135
16. Dusenbery VA (2008) Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs: conflicting assertions of Sikh identity in North American. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in



- global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 15–45
17. Dusenbery VA (2008) Socializing Sikhs in Singapore: soliciting the state's support. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 191–224
  18. Dusenbery VA (2008) The word as Guru: Sikh scripture and the translation controversy. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 72–91
  19. Dusenbery VA (2008) The poetics and politics of recognition: Diasporan Sikhs in pluralist polities. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 225–266
  20. Dusenbery VA (2008) Who speaks for Sikhs in the Diaspora? Collective representation in multicultural states. In: Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 313–326
  21. Dusenbery VA, Tatla DS (eds) (2009) Sikh Diaspora philanthropy in Punjab: global giving for local good. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
  22. Gabbi RS (1998) Sikhs in Australia. Aritoc Offset Press, Glen Weverley
  23. Jacobsh DR (2010) Authority in the virtual Sangat Sikhism, ritual and identity in the twenty-first century. In: Jacobsh D (ed) Sikhism and women: history, text and experience. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  24. Jaijee IS (1999) Politics of genocide: Punjab 1984–1998. Ajanta, Delhi
  25. Johnston H (1979) The voyage of the Komagata Maru: the Sikh challenge to Canada's colour bar. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  26. Juergensmeyer M (1988) Religious rebels in the Punjab. Ajanta, Delhi
  27. Juergensmeyer M (1993) Sikhism and religious studies. In: Hawley JS, Mann GS (eds) Studying the Sikhs: issues for North America. SUNY Press, Albany, pp 9–23
  28. Kahlon SS (2012) Sikhs in Latin America. Manohar, Delhi
  29. Kaur A (2011) Sikh migration and settlement in South-east Asia, 1870s–1950s. In: Shamsul AB, Kaur A (eds) Sikhs in Southeast Asia: negotiating an identity. ISEAS, Singapore, pp 17–42
  30. La Brack B (1988) The Sikhs of Northern California 1904–1986. AMS Press, New York
  31. La Brack B (1989) The new patrons: Sikhs overseas. In: Barrier NG, Dusenbery VA (eds) The Sikh diaspora: migration and experience beyond Punjab. Chanakya, Delhi, pp 261–304
  32. Leonard K (1992) Making ethnic choices: California's Punjabi-Mexican-Americans. Temple University Press, Philadelphia
  33. McLeod H (1984) Punjabis in New Zealand. Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar
  34. Mahmood CK (1996) Fighting for faith and nation: dialogues with Sikh militant. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia
  35. Mani A (2011) Sikhs in multi-ethnic Indonesia. In: Shamsul AB, Kaur A (eds) Sikhs in Southeast Asia. ISEAS, Singapore, pp 142–165
  36. Patel Z (1997) Challenge to Colonialism: the struggle of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee for equal rights in Kenya. East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi
  37. Puri H (1983) Ghadar movement: ideology, organisation and strategy. Guru Nanak University, Amritsar
  38. Rai J (2011) Khalistan is dead! Long live Khalistan! Sikh Form Relig Cult Theory 7(1):1–42
  39. Ramnath M (2011) Haj to utopia: how the Ghadar movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British Empire. University of California Press, Berkeley
  40. Randhawa MS (1954) Out of ashes: an account of the rehabilitation of refugees from West Pakistan in rural areas of East Punjab. Government of Punjab, Chandigarh
  41. Sandhu KS (1969) Indians in Malaya: some aspects of their immigration and settlement, 1786–1957. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK
  42. Shameel B (2005) Singh Yogi: paschmi dharti di sikh laher: bhai harbhjan singh yogiji da ruhani jivn (Sikh movement in the West: the life of Bhai Harbhajan Singh Yogi). Lokgeet, Chandigarh
  43. Shani G (2008) Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age. Routledge, London/New York
  44. Sidhu MS (1993) Sikhs in Thailand. Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
  45. Singh G (nd) The Sikhs of Fiji. South Pacific Social Science Association, Suva
  46. Singh G (1999) A victim Diaspora? The case of the Sikhs. *Diaspora* 8(3):303–310
  47. Singh G (2001) Ethnic politics in India: a case study of Punjab. Macmillan, London
  48. Singh G, Simon C, Tatla DS (2011) New forms of religious transnationalism: a case study of Dera Sant Sarwina Dass, Ballan, Punjab, India. University of Birmingham, International Development Department, Religion and Development Project, Working Papers No. 52
  49. Singh G, Tatla DS (2006) Sikhs in Britain: the making of a community. Zed Books, London
  50. Susan S (1999) The arts of the Sikh kingdoms. Victoria and Albert Publications, London
  51. Tatla DS (1992) Nurturing the faithful: the role of sant among Sikhs in Britain. *Religion* 22(4):349–374
  52. Tatla DS (1994) Minor voices: the evolution of Punjabi press in North America 1907–1994. *Int J Punjab Stud* 1(1):71–99
  53. Tatla DS (1999) The Sikh diaspora: the search for statehood. UCL Press/Routledge, London
  54. Tatla DS (2004) Sant Teja singh: a short biography. Punjab Centre for Migration Studies, Jalandhar
  55. Tatla DS (2004) Sikhs in multicultural societies. In: Rex J, Singh G (eds) Governance in multicultural societies. Ashgate, Aldershot
  56. Tatla DS (2009) Adieu to Punjab? Explaining contemporary Punjabi migration to overseas countries. In:

- Ghuman RS, Brar JS (eds) Globalization and change: perspectives from Punjab. Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp 387–408
57. Takhar O (2005) Sikh identity: an exploration of groups among Sikhs. Ashgate, Aldershot
  58. Tinker H (1974) A new system of slavery: the export of Indian labour. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  59. Tully M, Jacob S (1985) Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's last battle. Pan Books, London
  60. United Sikhs (2010) Global Sikh civil and human rights report 2010. United Sikhs, Washington, DC
  61. White B-S (ed) (1994) Turbans & traders: Hong Kong's Indian communities. Oxford University Press, Hong Kong

## Distinction

► [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Divisions

► [SECTS \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Dreams (Sikhism)

Balbinder Singh Bhogal  
Department of Religion, S.K.K. Bindra Chair in  
Sikh Studies, Hofstra University, Hempstead,  
NY, USA

## Synonyms

[Sapna](#); [Supna](#)

## Definition

Dreaming is used in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus to denote a state of being in the world, a mode of temporalization, characterized by illusion, impermanence, and attachment to material objects. This perspective is thought to present the world to a human who is egoistic and reliant upon

a dualistic form of consciousness. Reading our normal consciousness as committing an error allin to a dream projected by our dualistic ego allows for a unique possibility to arise, where in we may begin to live in a wakeful state without such projections, and mere by attain a state of equipoise with the world as it is.

## The Stuff Dreams are Made on

Given the near universal notion that the world is a dream – be it ancient Indian myth of *Vishnu* asleep on the snake *Ananta* (lit. endless, or limitless) who dreams the world into existence, to more modern expressions of the Shakespearean kind that “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on” – it is no surprise to see such an idea reanimated in the Sikh scripture. That is to say, the world is that sort of thing or happening, which is *not* what it seems – even after the most deep and sustained reflection, or the most penetrating science and rational investigation. Bhagat Ravidas outlines clearly the problematic and tragic situation:

“O Lord, what can I say about such an illusion (bhram)? Things are not as they seem. It is like a king, who falls asleep upon his throne, and dreams that he is a beggar; his kingdom is intact, but separated from it, he suffers in sorrow. Such is my own condition”. [1]

The situation is problematic because it is paradoxical such that life is a constant surprise to those that truly listen to it given its ever-changing nature. And it is tragic because very few really listen and understand that actually the world cannot be taken for what we think it is – that is if the world is really a dream it cannot have only one interpretation. Thus, the metaphor of being asleep that the dream is a part of primarily signifies a negative connotation (reflecting more its symbolic function): the falseness of self and world is integral to its transitory and illusory nature – as one usually dreams without knowing one is captured by a false and fleeting reality; that is to say, the dream's vanity is only revealed after one awakes. [2, 3] The *Guru Granth Sahib* explores various dimensions to this negative connotation of

being asleep dreaming. Firstly, the prime generator of the illusory dream (one projects onto the world) is ego (*haumai*) and its desire: Guru Amar Das sings, that “all are asleep in egoism” (and he lists *yogis*, householders, *pandits*, beggars in religious robes), for “*they are asleep, intoxicated with the wine of maia*”. [1] The same Guru extends this to “love of the other (duality)”: “Asleep in the love of duality, they never wake up; they are in love with, and attached to *maia*”. [1] *Maia* signifies here the self that attaches to the world (*Maia mohu*) in an ignorant and dualistic way just as an addict does with his/her drug. [2] *Maia* then expresses the social dimension of *haumai* – the individual ego. As such *maia* does not mean the world is unreal but that the ego is held captive by a subjective hallucination. Neither the world nor the self are delusory in and of themselves but become so through false identification. So long as the *self* miscognizes *itself* and attaches to the *world*, so long will subjectivity and objectivity remain the source of delusion and suffering. Secondly, akin to Buddhist rather than Vedic thought, the key characteristic of the real world is impermanence that checks all desire for assumed permanence, Guru Tegh Bahadur sings, “The body is false, but they believe it to be true; it is like a dream in the night. 1. Whatever is seen, shall all pass away, like the shadow of a cloud”. [1] Guru Nanak sings that one should understand clearly that if “the world is a drama staged in a dream,” then its “play,” passes “in a moment”. [1] And thirdly, given that the ego is a subjective mechanism that vainly tries to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, it (again vainly) attempts to reduce the world to the nature of objects for its own gratification. Simply put, Guru Arjan sings, “Enjoyments and pleasures are just like a dream” [1] – they yield no gratification – one remains thirsty even having dreamt of drinking copiously (of the pleasures of life); thinking the dream to be true one forsakes the real treasures of life. [3]

## The World as Illusion

Illusion, impermanence, and attachment make up the world of an egoistic and dualistic

consciousness asleep dreaming. Bhagat Kabir captures the tragic nature of this all-too-human situation in his blunt and terse style: “They set their own temple on fire, and then they fall asleep within it”. [1] Like a drunkard who knows not what harm s/he does while drunk, the person asleep dreaming is lost in an alternate reality oblivious to their surroundings. Guru Nanak laments this tragic situation of the human condition: “My Husband Lord remains awake, while I sleep through the entire night of my life”. [1] Once one has correctly diagnosed that most people are sleepwalking lost in their own deluding and deluded dreams, then the question becomes: “How long shall I remain asleep?”. [1] Akin to the addict’s experience who also asks how long shall I remain attached to this drug, the urgent injunction becomes: “Why are you asleep? Wake up, you ignorant fool!”. [1] Before one can overcome an addiction, one has to understand its particular nature; Guru Arjan illuminates,

“The eyes are asleep in corruption, gazing upon the beauty of another. The ears are asleep, listening to slanderous stories. The tongue is asleep, in its desire for sweet flavors. The mind is asleep, fascinated by *Maia*”. [1]

The world as *maia* – a sleep-inducing dream – is constantly noted for its key characteristics: duality, egoism, attachment, ignorance, etc. Guru Ram Das sings, “The whole world is like a game in a dream, all a game”. [1] Guru Arjan questions this attachment to the world as *maia*: “What is the use of the glory of *Maia*? It disappears in no time at all,” and like the addict fastened to the very thing that destroys their own life, Guru Arjan continues, “This is a dream, but the sleeper does not know it. In his unconscious state, he clings to it”. [1]

Sleep or dreaming therefore continues so long as the ego (*haumai*) is stuck fast to a dualistic (*dubidha*) mode of interpreting appearances. Such fearing and desiring is instigated by the ego’s ignorance (*agian*) of the Real that generates the dream of the world. The Individual is “asleep” to the real truth about himself and others, by believing his dream-like projections of them. Therefore the aim is to stop projecting (out of a subject-object, I-other, us-them, duality) and

wake up (*jagan*) from this dualistic and ego-centered world dream that is really a dream world of fear and desire. [2, 3]

Thus, this ego-duality-ignorance-attachment matrix expresses *maia* as a deluding and seductive binding. But *maia* can also be read in the pages of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as providing endless opportunities for liberating wisdom. That is to say, the world as *maia* is not wholly illusory, there is also a positive reading to the asleep/dream trope within the Guru's Word. Here the dream provides that internal space where one may meet or unite with the Husband (God) within an external place of the bedroom; that is to say both the subjective register of the mind as well as the objective register of the world can yield revelatory experience. [2] Thus, Guru Nanak sings, "In a dream, He came, and went away again; I cried so many tears. Even better than being awake, is the dream in which I dwell with God". [1] As one can meet God in dreams, for Sikhs dreams attain an authority that Freud denied but Jung explored – their insightful, intuitive, and prophetic dimension. Finally, the transition from the nature of dreams to the nature of waking consciousness has long signaled (within Indic traditions) the possibility for a second and true awakening: from the sleep of waking (dualistic) consciousness to a super, higher, nondual consciousness. It is only from the perspective of waking consciousness that dream or sleep consciousness can be seen and understood for what it is; similarly, as the argument goes, it is only from the (nondual) perspective of super wakeful consciousness that waking consciousness can be properly classed as a form of sleep consciousness. [2, 3]

The sleep/dream metaphor is superlative because it contains the subtlety to reflect both symbolic (linguistic/cultural) registers and semiotic (natural/primary) drives. In this regard the *Guru Granth Sahib* primary use of the asleep/dream metaphor is negative, but as we have seen it has also been used with a *positive* valence (reflecting more its semiotic register).

The paradoxical, problematic and tragic situation that the asleep/dream metaphor indicates does have a solution. Guru Arjan sings, "My darkness

was dispelled when I met the Lord. O Nanak, after being asleep for countless incarnations, I have awakened". [1] The shift that liberation depicts from darkness to light is here grafted onto the shift from being asleep to truly waking, akin to the Buddha's awakening that occurs only after countless births. And this shift is often framed as an existential difference between two orders of being/becoming: the self-centered Manmukh to the Guru-centered (selfless) Gurmukh:

"The self-willed manmukhs are asleep, in love and attachment to Maya. The Gurmukhs are awake, contemplating spiritual wisdom and the Glory of God. Those humble beings who love the Naam, are awake and aware". [1]

The former, *manmukh*, is caught and lost in the dream of the world without knowing it; only knows three states of consciousness (waking, dreaming and deep sleep) – and does not realize that s/he is separated (*vijog*) from the Real/God and therefore does not long for (re)union (*samai*). That is, to be attached to the love of the other (in duality) is to be in a dream-like state of unconscious living, a somnolent state. This unconsciousness is the cycle of birth-death-and-rebirth that creates the coming and going (*avan-javan*) of *sansar/samsara*. The latter, *gurmukh*, awakens to the true nondual unity (*avar-na-duja, ek*) or the real nature of things and is no longer seduced by the (subject-object, I-other, us-them) duality of life that fictionalizes reality into a divisive and self-centered "dream". She does not sleep but "remains awake day and night." Thus she/he knows the fourth state of consciousness (*cauthapad*); the *Gurmukh* therefore realizes the delusion of separation through the union with the Real/God/Mind. [2, 3]

## Awaking to Oneness

There are a number of stock answers the GGS delineates regarding this waking up: prime among them is to remember the Name and discern the Word; others include keeping the company of the true ones, loving devotion via the singing of God's praises, serving the Guru, and through this activity one naturally overcomes the ignorance

that leads to egotistical fears, desires and their concomitant vices. This karmic “solution” that each person can do, is conditioned by a clear teaching of grace such that this way of acting cannot be commodified or made into a technique that can be mechanically performed for one is also dependent upon God’s Will (*hukam*). [2] Guru Amar Das sings,

“Everyone lives, hoping in hope. Understanding His Command (*hukam*), one becomes free of desire. So many are asleep in hope. He alone wakes up, whom the Lord awakens. [1]

Thus the “solution” – according to *hukam* – is not merely a waking up from the ego’s dream but remembering a nondual and blessed mode of being as an existential possibility demonstrated by the Sikh Gurus and others. Absolutely pivotal to this remembering, however, is a transformed I/Mind – its conscious subduing and disciplining:

“I dedicate my mind and body, and place them in offering before the Lord. Asleep for countless lifetimes, I have awakened. He, to whom I belong, is my cherisher and nurturer. I have killed and discarded my murderous ego-ness”. [1]

## References

1. Manmohan Singh, Tr. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. (English-Punjabi translation). Amritsar: shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandale Committee, 1969. 8 vols.
2. Singh N (1990) Philosophy of Sikhism. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi
3. Singh P (2004) Spirit of the Sikh part II, vol 2. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Dumulla

► [Turban \(Sikhism\)](#)



---

# E

---

## Embodiment

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Emerit

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Enlightenment

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Ethics (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

---

## Definition

Ethics deals with questions regarding how to base ones action in relation to others and often considers what is moral in a particular context. For Sikhs, the main source for developing ethics is the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The ethical core is based upon the distinction between an ego-centered individual

(*manmukh*) versus a decentered individual (*gurmukh*). Thus, the typical understanding of ethics arising out of a focus on a self-willed being is resisted in Sikh thought through an antiethics or postethical discourse. This discourse arises out of the transformation from *manmukh* into *gurmukh*.

## Sikh Ethics

For guidance on ethics and morals, Sikhs look into a number of scriptural, theological, and exegetical sources which include the *Guru Granth Sahib*, accepted portions of the *Dasam Granth*, the *janamsakhi* genre, the writings of Bhai Gurdas, the *Rahitnamas*, and the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (SRM). [2, 3, 5, 7] The *Hukamnamas* written by the Sikh Gurus also provide evidence of the directives given to distant sangats. [8] Some of these sources are no longer as relevant to modern Sikhism as they would have been to the early tradition. Modern Sikhism privileges the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the SRM. However, the most important are the scriptural references from the *Guru Granth Sahib* as it is generally accepted that when the SRM is unclear or does not cover the issue the solution must be analyzed with thorough examination of the scripture. [1, 6, 10]

For *Khalsa* Sikhs the main ethical duty is a quest for justice on behalf of the weak, the needy or those whose basic rights have been disregarded by unscrupulous states or rulers. [11] To maintain some elementary public form

corresponding to certain ethical principles, *Khalsa* Sikhs pledge themselves to fulfill certain obligations such as wearing the five Ks, uphold prohibitions against cutting hair, shun the use of tobacco, or other intoxicants and avoid marrying non-Sikhs. [3–5] The *Rahitnamas* and the SRM are basically life-rules, organizational duties or codes of conduct which have developed in a particular context to address conflicts which arose for specific *sangats*. Therefore, the *Rahitnamas* can act as guides to discover how previous sangats found solutions to pressing problems of their time, while the SRM continues to provide guidance on how Sikhs ought to live. [4, 11] The compilers of these codes were faced with the need to consolidate differences and tensions within the early Sikh community by providing some form of internal discipline. Some came into being when the early *Khalsa* community was actively engaged in a battle for survival in the early part of the eighteenth century. [3, 5]

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and particularly under the modernizing influence of the *Singh Sabha*, the *Khalsa* way of life regained and even surpassed its earlier hegemonic position. [4, 11] For this reason, considerable effort was put into consolidating the earlier *Rahitnamas* into a more coherent code of conduct applicable to Sikh society and more in line with the *Guru Granth Sahib*. [4, 11] These efforts culminated in the formulation and ratification of the SRM in 1954 by the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC). Although the code outlined in the SRM continues to strongly influence the conduct of Sikhs, its limitations are all too evident. The conceptual framing of the SRM belongs to the colonial period where the competition between religious identities took precedence over other considerations. [1] Such a conceptual framing may have produced the desired effect in Punjab, but it is proving to be completely inadequate for contemporary life in the major metropolises of India and in the Western diasporas where Punjabi tradition and life style directly encounters a postsecular politics, technology, environmental concerns, and pluralism on a scale not seen before. [11]

To provide answers to increasingly complex ethical dilemmas Sikhs are beginning to bypass

the SRM and look at new ways of interpreting primary sources such as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The moral teachings contained in the *Guru Granth* are nonnormative and universal in the sense that they provide a guidance to humanity in general and not just to a specific community; it resists the imposition of a strictly conceptual logic based on metaphysical rationality or representational thinking. To the uninitiated reader the *Guru Granth*'s lack of rigid ideology and categorical imperatives ("you must do this . . .") can be disconcerting. This is partly because of the strong poetic and musical framing of the text which resists metaphysical schematizations such as God/Man/ World that privilege a transcendental deity over life itself. Such systems are routinely associated with "religions" and their belief systems; life itself is valued only in relation to its transcendental or sacred ground but that valuation leads to an inevitable moral and ethical drive to that religious system. The *Guru Granth Sahib*'s resistance to conceptual logic does not allow the reader to form absolute responses to issues that many of us are concerned with. While at first glance this may appear to be a limitation or even prevent the development of an ethical system, the historical record of secondary textual material which is clearly ethical in nature clearly contradicts such claims. Not only is this the case but contrary to be a limitation, the nonconceptual framework of the *Guru Granth Sahib* can enable adaptation to ethical issues as they arise as well as develop unique answers to pressing human problems without having to refer to a rigid conceptual framework. [11]

Guru Nanak does spell out something like a "moral standard" in the opening lines of the *Japji*, even though it cannot be made to coincide with societal norms of morality. Nanak identifies his moral standard as self-realization (*sachiarā*), the struggle to remain faithful to the truth of an experience of Oneness whose manifestation is ego less, and to therefore act and live according to a natural imperative (*hukam rajai chālana*) that undergirds any social law. The moral standpoint is not grounded in belief or standpoint; it is best considered as a general principle or sovereign imperative (*hukam*) which enjoins that whatever

the duties or discipline entailed by one's station (*rajai/raza*), these ought to be performed to the best of one's ability until one can progress to a higher station. We can therefore consider the moral "standard" as a way of performing actions such that in each act performed or duty fulfilled, we actively appropriate hukam that is inscribed into all existence. *Hukam* replaces the need for a transcendental ground; it is immanent within life (*hukmai andar sab koe, bahar hukam na koe*). The immanence of hukam results in the revaluation of life for itself and not as a supplement to "the sacred." Life itself is sovereign and cannot be captured within metaphysical distinctions such as sacred versus profane and sacred versus secular. This hukam, inscribed into all life, is the imperative to negate the ego which says "I am." The recognition of the inscription of hukam into all life is the point from which Sikh ethical thinking can begin to address current issues that face humanity while the limited applicability of the SRM to current issues is superseded. [11]

This process would return the process of ethical action to engagement and examination of the Guru Granth Sahib, more precisely the way that the process of ego loss gets articulated. If left untended, the sense of "I am"-ness becomes a disease engendered by five propensities that might be regarded as "moral evils." The Sikh Gurus refer to them as the "five enemies" or "five thieves": (i) *kam* (concupiscence, lust or simply craving); (ii) *krodh* (anger or wrath); (iii) *lobh* (covetousness or the desire to possess what belongs to others); (iv) *moh* (attachment or delusion); (v) *ahankar* (egotistical pride). These "five enemies" are psychic propensities of the self that either attract the person towards something (maybe an object or an action) or repel the person away from what is wholesome. They are better understood not as biological or primitive instincts, but as learned dispositions or habitual frames of mind that can take on a life of their own. If left unchecked these propensities keep the individual in a state of restlessness. The person whose being is motivated by these five enemies will continue to disregard hukam and in doing so will inscribe ego into his or her being, thereby perpetuating the cycle of attachment to one's own ego. Such

a person is referred to as a *manmukh* (lit. self-willed). However, as Guru Nanak reminds us in the first stanzas of his Japji, the "five enemies" cannot be controlled through ascetic practices, ritual cleansing, or by philosophically reflecting about them. Rather, they must be regulated by inculcating and actively practicing virtues such as wisdom (*gian*), truthfulness (*sach*), justice (*niaon*), temperance (*sanjam*), courage (*nidar*), humility (*garibi, nimarta*), and contentment (*santokh*). Those who actively appropriate such virtues are able to inscribe hukam into their very being as ego loss. They actively resist saying "I am" and instead balance this egotistical propensity by being able to say "I am not," and thereby elevate themselves beyond the self-willed rationalist morality of societal norms (*manmukh*). Appropriating *hukam* (the sovereign imperative that resists being rationalized into a system of knowledge) forces the individual to think and act ethically. This ethics is not strictly rationalistic; it is the actions of an aesthete or artist. Such a person is freed and empowered to challenge existing values, freed to create new values rather than blindly following social rules. This individual is known as *gurmukh*. They take us beyond socially normative ethical binaries such as good versus evil, wrong versus right, and violence versus peace. The *gurmukh* interrupts the frameworks in which we operate even as it allows for making deliberate, conscious choices in both mundane challenges of everyday life, and the more extraordinary quandaries that face human beings today. Consequently, the Gurus' teachings are ethically grounded and applicable to actual and possible life situations\*. [11]

## Cross-References

- [Gurmukh](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)

\*An earlier version of this entry appears in Chapter 6 of Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A guide for the perplexed*, London: Bloomsbury. 2013.

## References

1. Sikh Rahitmaryada. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar
2. Kohli SS (1974) Sikh ethics. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi
3. McLeod WH (1987) The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama. University of Otago Press, Dunedin
4. McLeod WH (2003) Sikh of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
5. Padam PS (1991) Rahitname. Bhai Chatar Singh Jivan Singh, Amritsar
6. Sharma A (2007) The philosophy of religion: a Sikh perspective. Rupa, New Delhi
7. Singh A (1970) Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala
8. Singh G (1985) Hukamname: Guru Sahiban, Banda Singh, ate Khalsa ji de. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (2004) Janamsakhi tradition: an analytical study. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
10. Singh S (1982) Philosophical foundations of the Sikh value system. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi
11. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed. London: Bloomsbury

---

## Ethnography

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Exactness

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Excellency

- [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

# F

---

## Fact

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Factuality

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Faith

- [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Fate (Destiny), Sikhism

Balbinder Singh Bhogal  
Department of Religion, S.K.K. Bindra Chair in  
Sikh Studies, Hofstra University, Hempstead,  
NY, USA

## Synonyms

[Creation](#); [Creator](#); [Dharam](#); [Karam](#); [Karma](#);  
[Moksha](#); [Nadar](#)

## Definition

Fate can be understood as the workings of a mysterious cosmic order which affects things in the world. In South Asia, this notion may include an idea of an immutable deity who asserts this mysterious order but it is made more complex by the inclusion of notions like *karma*, *dharma*, *samsara*, and *moksha*.

## Early Notions of Fate as the Mysterious Cosmic Order

Fate refers to the idea that events occur according to a predetermined but unpredictable or mysterious pattern. The immutability of such a fixed pattern may be determined by independent deities (like Moirai in Greek mythology), or an Agent, like Allah, who decrees one's fate (*qadar*); however, it is disputable whether the pattern is truly immutable or not. [2] Fate can also be understood as simply the workings of a mysterious Cosmic Order, hence the growth of astrology, which in theory makes this invisible ordering of life visible (in the manner of traditional divination and prophecy exploit), and thus, some believe, may also provide knowledge to be able to change one's destiny.



## Later Monotheistic Religions' Dismissal of Fate via the Notion of God's Will

It is clear that there has been a tension between notions of a relatively independently working fate sown into the fabric of existence as an invisible and unknowable Cosmic Order, and the omniscience of a Supreme Deity, especially as it occurs in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, that tend to collapse fate or destiny into Jahwah's/God's/Allah's Will. The Indian context is more complex given the additional ideas of *karma*, *dharma*, *samsara* and *moksha*.

### The Indian Context: Fate Tied to Karma

*Karma* (Panjabi *karam*) represents the law of cause and effect of one's actions that each will reap just what they sow such that present actions determine future outcomes. This idea is generally accepted by most Indian traditions. However, it is key to understand that the very cycle of birth and death (*samsara*, *sansar*) instigated by one's actions, is perceived as a conditioned chain that can and should be broken to reach liberation, and ultimate freedom (*moksha*, *nirvana*). [3] Fate, within this karmic context then is not seen as a fixed and immutable law, but expresses the law of action by which one binds or liberates oneself, as with the phenomenon of addiction it is clear that certain actions will lead towards bondage (usually vice) and certain others (usually virtue) towards freedom – but exactly which and how to perform them is a subtle and disputed matter. [2]

Jainism and early Buddhism tend to read karma as more an individual and mechanical law that neither God nor Guru can alter or diminish. However, the more devotional and theistic traditions introduce the notion of grace as a greater and overriding law and even though karma is accepted, God becomes the dispenser of the fruits of one's actions and their possible eraser: human's control their actions, but God controls the result or consequence(s), and through grace becomes the sole agent able to erase one's karmic debt. [3]

## Fate in Sikhism

In each culture, it is also clear that fate does not exist as an independent conceptual term but is part of a cluster of terms and concepts, making any explication of the term fate alone severely limited if not misleading. Within the Sikh tradition notions of fate occur within a broader context of Cosmic Order and Ordinance, Divine Grace, Pleasure and Will (*hukam*, *nadar*, *bhaai*) and the fundamentally human notion of action, duty and their recorded consequence (*karam*, *dharam*, *lekhaa*, *lekhu*, and *likhiaa*), which bring into play notions of responsibility, justice, judgment, reward and punishment, conditioning and deconditioning, grace and transformation. [2, 4]

The various shades of meaning found in the GGS around this issue of karma (*karam*), fate (*lekh*), cosmic order, ordinance and God's Will (*hukam*) and grace (*nadar*), cover and reread the whole gamut of Indian religious thought including the transition from the more impersonal cosmic order (*rita*) to the later personal and caste specific *dharma*, as well as the Islamic notions of fate (*qadar*), nature (*qudrat*) and divine command (*hukam*). For example, fate/destiny/predestination (*lekh*) occurs inseparably from action (*karam*), and this strand forms an essential part of a broader theme of God's Will (*hukam*), Grace (*nadar*), and Pleasure (*bhaai*); the first two are Arabic/Persian terms, and the latter is Indic. Every deed is recorded (*lekh*, *lekha*), so that human action (*karam*) is a writing/making, (*likhia/kamaia*) that occurs and is judged, beyond anyone's calculation, within the context of a cosmic ordinance (*hukam*) governed by God's Will (*raza*), Pleasure (*bhai*), and Grace (*nadar*). [2, 4]

The Guru Granth Sahib appears to dismiss both those that only believe in the efficacy of their own actions (like some Buddhists traditions), as well as those that wholly and blindly trust in an external fate (like some Hindu theistic traditions). Not unlike Honen's twelfth century Pure Land conceptions of *other-power* (*tariki*) and *self-power* (*jiriki*), the Gur-Sikh reading of the issue combines narratives of both divine will and grace

(other power) as being related to if not inseparable from human will and action (self-power); *nadar* (representing other-power) is actually closely related to *karam* (self-power), and as such, the Gur-Sikh view becomes a unique though critical flowering out of the soil of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic views. [2, 5]

## Important Religophilosophical Background

It is important to note that the ground upon which Gur-Sikhi manages to combine insights from Vedic (Upanishadic), Buddhist, Yogic, Tantric, Bhaktic, and Islamic/Sufi thought as well as “ordinary” “mundane” householder, public, military, and state modes of life, is an *existential one*. [4, 5] This impermanent and existential ground provided the means to enact a radical rereading of those traditions’ most sacred and treasured ideas: Nirvana and Allah, Sunyata and Sabda, the impersonal and personal, and the impermanent and permanent. The interdependent and eternal were combined in Guru Nanak’s Hari (God) – which is not therefore the Hari or Ram of Vaishnavism nor the Siva of Saivism, nor is it the Shakti of the Goddess traditions, and nor is Guru Nanak’s *nirvaan* and *sunni* of Buddhism, nor the Allah of Islam. [2]

Over four centuries before Paul Tillich argued to reunderstand God not as a special (supreme) being among beings but as the very ground of being itself, Guru Nanak collapsed the transcendent (*nirgun*) into the immanent (*sargun*) – for him God is Being and Becoming. God, as Universe, thus becomes ever changing and ever new, “*sahib mera nita nava*” [1], as well as immovable and unchanging (*atal*, *nihacal*) in terms of the inherent invisible and imperceptible Being in all becomings, often understood as *nam*, *sabd*, *satguru*, *sunni-samadh*, *cautha-pad*, *turiya*). [4, 5] Thus, unlike the Abrahamic monotheisms that valorize the hierarchy of God over man, Spirit over flesh, Eternal over time, etc., the Sikh Gurus radically equalized that verticality by a horizontal

frame of time, space and embodiment. At best one has to read *Gur-Sikhi* as a nondual monotheism, or a monopantheism, where God becomes a timeless form (*Akal Murat*) – i.e., like life itself (*jag-jivan*) that is never captured by any one form so that neither a beginning nor an end could ever be detected; the One is the Many, Creator is the Created unfolding in and as time, space, and form. [2]

This nonhierarchical or horizontal perspective leads to the paradoxical or simply nondual formulations of the Gur-Sikh way as *raj-jog*, *sant-sipahi*, *sahaj-bhakti*, *jogi-bhogi*, *gur-sikhi*, warrior-saint, ascetic-sensualist, natural love, and householder-hermit, etc. [2] It should also be noted that the Indic term *karam* (action) in Panjabi means fate or destiny, whilst also echoing the Arabic/Persian meanings of grace and favor. This Indic/Panjabi–Arabic/Persian layered ambiguity is common for the Guru’s to exploit, as well as literalize through the compounds and couplets such as *nadar-karam*. God as Existential Being Itself in all its ever-new becomings is crucial to outline because now we can understand more clearly why the various dualities in *Gur-Sikhi* thought must be understood as nondual complementarities. In this regard will (*hukam*) and grace (*nadar*) must be understood together alongside fate (*lekh*) and works (*karam*). [2]

## Fate and Karam in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS)

It must first be noted that the GGS accepts the basic idea that each individual will reap what they sow through the notion of action as a writing (*karam-likhia*): “*virtue and vice do not come by mere words; actions repeated, over and over again, are engraved on the soul and go with you [after death of the body]. You shall reap what you sow*”. [1] Thus, the Gurus argue, “*Don’t blame others, O people; as you plant, so shall you harvest*.” But the very next lines further note that it is this very link (between action and consequence) that forms one’s future fate: “*By your actions, you have bound yourself*. [and thus] *You come and go*,

*entangled in Maia*". [1] In this (Being as Action) context then we seal our own fate by our own actions. As noted, the sealing of this fate is communicated through the theme of writing (*lekhu*), an inscribing (*likhia*) of a record (*lekha*) of all one's deeds onto one's soul symbolized on the forehead: "*Your destiny (lekhu) is written (likhiaraa) on your forehead (masataki), according to your past actions (purabi kamaia). This inscription (lekhu) of past deeds cannot be erased; what do I know about what will happen?*". [1]

Thus, action or self is a human writing that writes its own fate. This karmic process is impersonal and absolute – since the account "cannot be erased." The Sikh divine enters the scene of human writing as the guarantor of the link between action and consequence – that is as personifying as the justice of natural or cosmic law (*hukam*). So when the Guru says "God has written one's destiny," this is not to be understood independently of the karmic process, but as a way to remind all that the links between action and consequence, though ultimately indecipherable and only knowable to God, are unbreakable. Such a situation (Being as Action), therefore, requires trust that goes beyond mere reason, as calculation and comparison are dominated by self-interest (*haumai*). The Gur-Sikh, moving beyond egoistic self-centeredness, comes to accept and see the justice (*niau*) inherent in each and every event that makes up a life and in doing so, reunderstands each event as a gift (*daat*) from God's perfect order (*hukam*). [2] In other words that you should reap what only you sow is understood as not only practically true but also sacrosanct as it is simultaneously understood as being inscribed by the Creator, the True Guru: "*The inscription (lekhu) inscribed (likhia) by the Creator, O girl friends, cannot be erased*". [1]

This is also why one's repeated actions could be understood as making a "preordained," or "predestined," or "predetermined" pattern: "*As it is pre-ordained/written (lekhai), people speak their words. As it is pre-ordained, they consume their food. As it is pre-ordained, they walk along the way. As it is pre-ordained, they see and hear. As it is pre-ordained, they draw their breath. Why should I go and ask the scholars about this?.... In that place where the lowly are cared for-there, the*

*Blessings of Your Glance of Grace rain down (nadari terii bakhasiis)*". [1]

Free Will and Determinism, Fate and Grace, Destiny and Agency, individual Action and God's Will/, Nature and Nurture, the law of causality and the notion of Gift or Blessing are not therefore opposites here; they are both reflective of different aspects or perspectives of the same inscrutable existential process of a Cosmic Ordinance (*hukam*) – that is to say, *hukam* includes *karam*, *lekh*, *nadar*, and *bhaai*. The whole process reflects an ontology of Being as Action (rather than Being based on a metaphysical substance) – and is described through the ambiguous conflation of divine and human narratives of action as inscription become fate and divinely sanctioned destiny. [2] Indeed, it is through action "good" deeds that one gains release from the cycle of conditioned existence: "*You can't get to heaven by talk; one is delivered by the practice of truth (chuutai saccu kamaai)*". [1]

This contradictory and double perspective is employed to overcome the inherent duality in language and experience expressed through a subject-object frame and though this attachment to the other (which forms *maai*) is itself "created by the Creator" along with egoism (*haumai*), the true and liberative mode of being is to transcend this subject-object duality in a mystical nondual consciousness (*chauta-pad*, *turiya*, *sahaj*, *sunm-samadhi*, etc) where "there is no other, nor second" (*avar naa duujaa*): "*Forever and ever; You are the only One; You set the **play** of the Other (duujaa) in motion. You created egoism (haumai) and pride, and You placed greed within our beings. Keep me as it pleases (Bhaavai) You; **everyone acts as You cause them to act.** Some are forgiven, and merge with You; through the Guru's Teachings, we are joined to You*". [1]

On one hand God is "the fisherman and the fish" the "water and the net" [1] and on the other a real difference is acknowledged to exist between a selfish mode of existing (*manmukh*) and a selfless mode of existing (*gurmukh*) – and that one should move from the former to the latter. Because of an ontology of Being as Action, neither perspective can be taken separately and exclusively, for the Guru's clearly reject both *theism* – that merely emphasizes omnipotence

and grace, as well as *humanism* – where rational man is master of his actions. The Guru’s espoused a nondual “existential–theology” throughout the *Guru Granth Sahib*. [2, 4, 5] For example, in a hymn of six lines, the third and last lines read: “O Nanak, [through His grace/action] (He is found) by those, upon whose faces and foreheads such pre-recorded destiny is written (*likhiaa hovai lekhu*) . . . Falling into them [*sin*], one is burned, O Nanak! One is saved only by holding tight to good deeds (*karamii lagi*)”. [1] Here both divine writing and human action are conflated.

It is common for one hymn (composed of only four verses as below) to combine all these terms to form one complex understanding of fate and action – as the elaboration of His graceful glance (*nadar*), judgment (*bura bhala*), and pleasure (*bhavai*):

“You Yourself, O Creator, know everything; what can I possibly tell You?  
You see all the bad and the good; **as we act, so are we rewarded**. ||1||  
O my Master, You alone know the way/manner of my inner being.  
You see all the bad and the good; **as it pleases You, so You make us speak**. ||1||[Pause]”

Here, we have the double reading of human free will and divine determination. The rest of the hymn elaborates the divine invisible “side” of human visible action:

*Hari (God) has infused the love of Maaiaa into all bodies; (and it is also) in this body that He causes man to perform devotion.  
You unite some with the True Guru, and bless them with peace; while others, the self-willed manmukhs, You entangle in worldly affairs.* ||2|| [1]

In the above verse, we see the elaboration of the divine writing of one’s destiny – which would seem to make the whole process fatalistic and arbitrary; *He* attaches us to illusory pursuits, *He* chooses to liberate some while binding others. But it must not be forgotten that the hymn is elaborating the first verse (given the structure of the *rahaau* – pause) where we reap what we sow: *jehaa ko kare tehaa ko paaiiai*. The final two verses:

“All belong to You, and You belong to all, O my Creator; You wrote the words of destiny on the forehead of everyone (*sabhanaa siri likhiaa lekhu*).

*As You bestow Your Glance of Grace (nadari karahi), so does (all) become; without Your Gracious Glance (binu nadarii), no one appears [assumes form].* ||3||

*You alone know Your Greatness; everyone constantly meditates on You.*

*That one, with whom You are pleased (bhaavai), is united with You; O servant Nanak, only such a one finds a place [before God].* ||4||2||13||”. [1]

Thus, *nadar* and *karam* operate under *hukam*: “O Nanak, through *hukam* the Master drives them on (according to) the way they are attached”. [1] One could even say that what is pleasing to Him is the justice inherent in *karam* – to reap what you sow. It is not pleasing, to Him, however, if one never learned from one’s mistakes. Here, *Gur-Sabd* is Experience or “event” is the most exacting teacher but also the most rewarding and often-times surprising guide. In this regard, even the worst fate is still reason for praise as it is seen as a gift: “If my body were afflicted with pain, under the evil influence of unlucky stars; and if the blood-sucking kings were to hold power over me – even if this were my condition, I would still worship and adore You, and my longing to chant Your Praises would not decrease”. [1]

## What Action Liberates?

How to transform one’s *karam* from writing a fate that binds to one that liberates is repeatedly given by the Gurus: “walk in the Way of the Guru’s Will/ Pleasure (*Bhai*) . . . Sit in the home of your own being . . . Without loving devotion, you cannot dwell in your own home - listen, everyone! . . . She burns away her emotional attachment to *maia* (*maia mohu*) . . . O Nanak, if she recognizes her own self (*aape aapu pachanai*), then, as *Gurmukh*, she merges in celestial peace”. [1] In this same hymn, it is also stressed that life is short (“your stay in this world shall last only four days”; there is little time to redirect action, correct it, decondition and liberate it. Guru Nanak ponders “how shall I tell them this (truth): without (good) deeds (*karama bahare*), they will wander astray”. [1] His hesitation can be explained because the answer is not simply to choose virtue over vice, for “God can give even the unvirtuous virtue”

(*niraguni gunu kare*). [1] Nor is it merely to remember the inner intentional and emotional structure of external action, as in “*let mercy be your mosque, faith your prayer-mat, and honest living your Qu’ran; make modesty your circumcision, and good conduct your fast – thus one becomes a (true) Muslim*”. [1]

Action has to be not merely good or virtuous but liberating, and this makes action much more subtle and mercurial. This is clearly recognized by the Gurus, in fact to such an extent that they sing about an actionless action or blessed action: “*To see without eyes; to hear without ears; to walk without feet; to work without hands; to speak without a tongue like this, one remains dead while yet alive. O Nanak, recognize the Hukam and merge with your Master*”. [1] The kind of action that goes beyond merely “good” to “liberative,” is action that no longer karmically writes. For a nonkarmic action to be possible, the ego or sense of I-am-ness has to be paused (*haumai mari*) – such that its fears and desires dissolve which in turn involves transcending the dualistic subject–object consciousness of the ordinary waking mind and imbuing it with the fear and love of Being as Action. The question that concerns the Gurus’ *sahaj-bhakti* then is not *what* action liberates, but *how* to perform action so that even the most mundane action can liberate: “*O Nanak, meeting the True Guru, one comes to know the Perfect Way (jugati); while laughing, playing, dressing, and eating, he is liberated (mukati)*” (GGS: 522, *Guujarii*, Guru Arjan).

## Cross-References

- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Mind \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Manmohan Singh, Tr. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (English - Punjabi translation) (1969). Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, vol 8.
2. Bhogal BS (2001) Nonduality and skillful means in Guru Nanak: hermeneutics of the word. Unpublished PhD, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University

3. King R (1999) Indian philosophy: an introduction to Hindu and Buddhist thought. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh
4. Singh N (1990) Philosophy of Sikhism. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi
5. Singh P (2004) Spirit of the Sikh part II, vol 2. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Festivals

- [Calendar \(Nanakshahi\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Festivals (Sikhism)

Rahuldeep Singh Gill  
California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks,  
CA, USA

## Definition

Sacred days in the Sikh calendar.

## Main Text

### The Year’s Sacred Cycle

Two types of events populate the annual Sikh festival calendar: commemorations of happenings in the lives of the community’s ten successive founding figures (Gurus, 1469–1708) and the holidays associated with the ebb and flow of the agrarian seasons of the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, where Sikhism originated. According to Sikh doctrine, no time is any more sacred than any other as every moment provides the possibility for divine grace. Divisions of time like the seasons, days, and hours ought not distract practitioners from the ubiquitous divine unity. Sikhs strive to remember the divine gifts at every moment’s passing. From early on in history, Sikhs articulated the need to shun the festivals of Indian culture and celebrate their own holy days. They celebrate the days by congregating with other Sikhs, making and consuming foods of



celebration, singing hymns, and contemplating the Gurus' teachings. In practice, other festivals that are celebrated are tied in with the phases of the moon and the changing of the seasons.

One festival that Sikhs have celebrated for centuries is the Indian fall harvest festival *Diwali*. The celebration of the fall harvest was also a time to bring tithes to the Sikh center during the period when the Gurus were alive. All over India, *Diwali* is celebrated with the lighting of lamps and a festive atmosphere of goodwill. In the Hindu tradition, the celebration of *Diwali* is related to the goddess of good fortune, *Lakshmi*. For Sikhs, who are monotheists, the day is associated with the life of the sixth Guru, Hargobind (d. 1644), and his release from an imperial jail where he was being held as a political prisoner.

Indian culture celebrates the end of winter with a colorful and raucous festival called *Holi*. The tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh (d. 1708), commenced a distinctively Sikh celebration of end of winter the day after *Holi* called *Hola Mahalla*. During this festival, the Guru would sponsor a peacetime battle game between two teams of his warriors. He would watch them perform military maneuvers and reward victory and bravery at fort called *Hol Garh*. [3] Today *Hola Mahalla* is celebrated with great fanfare in Anandpur, and the central event of the day is a procession of Sikh warriors brandishing the weapons that would have been utilized in Guru Gobind Singh's day.

The most celebrated and distinctively Sikh of the festivals is *Vaisakhi*, linked with the spring harvest. Along with *Diwali*, the celebration of the fall harvest, *Vaisakhi* was a biannual time to bring tithe to the Sikh center. The celebration of this festival today is also associated with the life of Guru Gobind Singh and marks the day when he abolished the practice of bringing tithe to middlemen called masands. The abolition of this middling authority made the Sikh community sovereign under God and Guru, and Guru Gobind Singh declared it to be *Khalsa* ("sovereign") during a *Vaisakhi* celebration. Guru Gobind Singh had invited Sikhs to visit Anandpur, his town in the Shivalik foothills of the Himalaya mountains. The declaration of the community to be the *Khalsa* took place in the 1690s at Anandpur. At

this event, the Guru offered initiation to Sikhs through a process called *Khande Di Pahul* ("straight-sword rites") or *Amrit Sanchar* ("distribution of non-death nectar"). Those who took this initiation, and agreed to live their lives according to a strict code of discipline, were called Singhs. They were battle-ready "lions" ready to give their lives for the community. Thus, today, *Vaisakhi* is celebrated with great fanfare to commemorate the rebirth of the community as the *Khalsa*, a day when the Guru exalted the community to the status equal to Guru.

Today, this festival is celebrated in many different ways. In Anandpur, the site of the original celebration, *Khande Di Pahul* is offered to anyone who feels compelled to take the vow or renew a previous one. There is great diversity of celebrations in the Sikh diaspora, all over the world. For example, the *Vaisakhi* celebration in Los Angeles entails the local communities renting out the downtown Convention Center and competing with basketball's Lakers fans for parking spaces in a highly urban celebration. A few hundred miles away in the agricultural San Joaquin valley in central California, Sikhs celebrate more like they would have in rural Punjab with a lively outdoor festival in the wide open space of a converted field.

Sikh places of worship, or gurdwaras, also celebrate *sangrand*, the first day of every lunar month in the Indian calendar. In some devout households, celebration of *sangrand* features reading from particular hymns from scripture, formal prayer of supplication (*Ardas*), reading of a passage at random from the scripture (*vak* or *hukam*), and distribution of sacrament (*karah parshad*). On this day, devotees offer prayers as well as charitable donations to begin the month in a meritorious way. According to the month that is beginning, a member of the congregation will read and comment upon verses from Guru Nanak's composition about the twelve months (*Barah Maha*). The poems relate events in the natural world to human experience, particularly to the soul's quest for divine interaction. In Punjabi folk culture, no-moon nights (*amassya*) are also times of the month when devotees seek spiritual illumination in places of

worship, and gurdwaras see a spike in attendance on those days.

The term *gurpurab* (“day of the Guru”) refers to any number of birth, death, and other life event days associated with the ten Gurus and their families. The most important of these are the birth celebrations of Guru Nanak (the first Sikh Guru) and Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth and last of the living Gurus). The days of martyrdom of Guru Arjan (fifth Guru), Guru Tegh Bahadur (ninth Guru), and the *Sahibzadas* (“princes”, referring to Guru Gobind Singh’s sons) are also commemorated with festive energy. Guru Arjan’s 1606 martyrdom is unique in commemoration: it takes place during some of the hottest days of the year in Punjab (early June), and devotees set up stalls to hand out cool drinks to passersby to help remember the Guru’s suffering at the hands of his imperial captors.

Sacred times of the year are also marked by unbroken reading (*akhand path*) of the Sikh scriptures, which can take 3 days to complete and requires several readers taking several hour-long shifts. Processions and parades in which Sikhs sing hymns around a neighborhood (*Nagar Kirtan*) is a particularly urban expression of Sikh piety. Singing of hymns from Sikh scripture in some respect is common to all celebrations, as is the institution of community-sponsored kitchen (*langar*) where free meals are distributed to all who attend.

At festival times on the subcontinent, Sikhs congregate at any of the historical gurdwaras administered by the official Sikh gurdwara governing body (SGPC). In the homeland or abroad, Sikhs may also celebrate festive moments at their neighborhood gurdwaras, which are administered by local congregations. The most sacred of *gurdwaras*, and the most auspicious place to celebrate festivals, is the *Darbar Sahib* in Amritsar, founded by the fourth Guru.

The festivities are often celebrated with rich food (often buttery and fried) and sweet drinks. The meals served at Sikh celebration events are almost always vegetarian, so that members of any number of religious groups and cultural preferences can partake. However, on very special occasions like *Vaisakhi*, some gurdwaras are known to serve goat to those who would choose to consume it. Alcohol is never served on sacred ground. At

Anandpur on the occasion of *Hola Mahalla*, members of a band of warrior Sikhs called *Nihangs* sell a mixture of milk and hash to willing pilgrims.

Important Gurpurabs	
January	Birth of Guru Gobind Singh
April	Elevation of the Khalsa
June	Martyrdom of Guru Arjan
September	Installation of Granth by Guru Arjan (especially in 2004)
October	Installation of Guru Granth (especially in 2008)
October	Death of Guru Gobind Singh
November	Guru Nanak’s birth
November	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur
December	Martyrdoms of Guru Gobind Singh’s sons

Cross-References

► [Calendar \(Nanakshahi\), Sikhism](#)

References

1. Grewal JS (1990) *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, New York  
2. Mann G (2004) *Sikhism*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey  
3. Nabha KS (1981) *Gurushabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*. Language Department, Patiala

Foible

► [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

Folklore (Sikhism)

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Definition

Folklore is a form of popular narration that pervades a particular group of people and connects them through the medium of its telling. Typically,

folklore involves the values, traditions, and ways of thinking and behaving which that group espouses. It is a pervasive, mainly oral, type of storytelling that spans a broad sweep of genres, themes, and motifs that circulate at an everyday level to inform the lives of those people who define themselves as members of a particular group of people.

## Main Text

Folklore is transmitted and learned informally, and it is an unofficial kind of knowledge that affects behavior and touches many aspects of human experience. Thus, it unsurprisingly forms an integral feature of many religious traditions much as it does for Sikhs. It is interesting to note that for Sikhs, the folk tradition developed simultaneously along two trajectories: (1) it is that thread of commonality that linked Sikhs to broader groups, and (2) Sikhs drew from the extant folk traditions to adapt these for their own unique needs.

Punjab's folklore is quite ancient, and during the early Sikh period, this ancient but adaptive lore functioned across a large body of people to inculcate a particular understanding of how to interpret events in the world. Folklore was often told by elders, the wise, religious mendicants, bards for didactic purposes. It was also told often in gendered and exclusive spaces that existed within society, and often, it would impact juridical as well as political decisions at local and translocal levels. However, this was complicated by mirroring of events from the world as well as the frequent incorporation and elaboration of actual events through folkloric motifs.

The story of Rasalu Raja, as narrated by Flora Annie Steel, is a case in point. In this story, one finds references to Guru Gorakhnath, a legendary *Nathpanthi yogi*, as well as the story of love, intrigue, and revenge between Raja Salbhan, his two wives, Rani Acchra and Rani Luna, and Prince Puran. Puran, who was supposed of have been killed because of Luna's deceiving of the Raja, returns as a faqir. Luna, desiring a son, is convinced by Puran Faqir to reveal what

happened to the Raja's first son and to also explain how and why it happened. In return, the *faqir* grants Luna the boon of a son, Raja Rasalu, as well as the curse of weeping a thousand tears just as Puran's mother Acchra was made to weep upon being reft from her to be killed. Upon arriving upon the moment of birth, Luna seeks the aid of some jogis in order to determine the fate of her son. She is told that he will be great and widely known, but she is also informed that if either her or the father sees their son before he is 12 years old, then he will surely die. Thus, with a mix of magic, religion, political intrigue, jealousy, revenge, envy, and prophecy, Raja Rasalu is thought to have been born.

It can be said that to some degree the cultural landscape of Punjab was a pluralistic and enchanted one which was woven together partially through the use of a common folkloric tradition. However, in making such claims, one needs to remember that such assertions are still debated in the secondary literature. While distinctions were maintained between variations in personal manners of identification, at the same time these distinctions were held together through the manner of their interactions in folk literature. The degree of intertextuality that pervaded the cultural landscape can be seen through the use of openly contradictory notions of reincarnation by leading exegetes of the Sikh tradition as it developed theologically. Harjot Oberoi describes this using as an example the debate between Anandghan and Santokh Singh. While the degree of penetration of the notion of reincarnation was the focal point for a theological debate, the idea of reliance upon Vedic thought to substantiate the writings of the Sikh Gurus was rarely questioned. We can move from theology to "martyrolatry," where Louis E. Fenech describes the commonalities between Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim narrations of martyrs as well as the common veneration of martyrs regardless of the particular religious identity they may have espoused. Stepping outside the bounds of Fenech's argument, one could think of it as though the act of martyrdom severed the martyr from nominal religiosity. This is further seen through the common worship of trees, the sun, a host of animals, and shrines for figures like

Khwaja Khizr and Guga Pir. In this plural and multicultural landscape, the narrativization of folk literature not only continued to be revived in popular memory, there was also general awareness that great heroic actions would enshrine the actor for perpetuity.

One formative event that entered the common folk literature which arose out of the Sikh tradition was the radical encounter with the divine that Guru Nanak experienced. The incorporation of Guru Nanak's experiences and his devotional poetry in the form of hagiographical narratives called *janamsakhis* can be seen as one of the key moments where folk traditions impacted Sikhs and also where Sikhs transformed folk tradition for their own purposes. Another genre of hagiographic writing known as *gurbilas* came to focus largely on the lives of Guru Hargobind and, later, Guru Gobind Singh's heroic exploits. However, the deployment of folk literature, themes, motifs, and tropes was not a secondary approach limited only to understanding the events or writing of the Guru's lives. Indeed, the Sikh gurus employed folkloric motifs in the expression which formed their bani. This endeavor seems to be further embraced in the writings of the bards and bhagats found in the *Guru Granth Sahib* but also was apparently encouraged by, at least, Guru Gobind Singh as can be seen in the *Dasam Granth*. This process of incorporation into a folkloric modality of actual events, personalities, as well as political and religious concerns can be seen to have been operative up to the recent past with events following Operation Blue Star. In this manner, folklore can also be understood as a type of catharsis for Sikhs.

## Cross-References

- [Janamsakhis](#)
- [Punjabi Language](#)

## References

1. Dundes A (1980) Interpreting folklore. Indiana University Press, Bloomington
2. Fenech LE (2000) Martyrdom in the Sikh tradition: playing the 'Game of Love'. OUP
3. Hans S (1988) A reconstruction of Sikh history from Sikh literature. ABS Publications, Jalandhar
4. Johal DS (2005) Panjabi heroic poetry. In: Grewal R, Pall S (eds) Precolonial and colonial Punjab. Manohar, New Delhi
5. McLeod WH (1980) Early Sikh tradition: a study of the Janamsakhis. OUP
6. McLeod WH (1980) The B40 Janam-Sakhi. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
7. Nijhawan M (2006) Dhadi Darbar: religion, violence, and the performance of Sikh history. OUP
8. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Chicago University Press, Chicago
9. Orring E (1986) Folk groups and Folk genres: an introduction. Utah State University Press, Logan
10. Sims M, Stephens M (2005) Living folklore: an introduction to the study of people and their traditions. Utah State University Press, Logan
11. Steel FA (1983) Tales of the Punjab: folklore of India. Greenwich House, New York

---

## Frailty

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

# G

---

## Genuineness

► [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Ghadar Movement

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and  
Cultures, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,  
MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Ghaddhar](#); [Ghadhar](#)

## Definition

An anti-colonial resistance movement which began in California in the early twentieth century that espoused violent uprising against the British as the solution to colonial domination. Ideologically, the movement was framed by Marxist and/or Anarchist strands of thought.

## Main text

### Nondual Anarchy, Violence, and Secular Religion

The Ghadar movement was launched in 1913 and consisted of a group of mainly diasporic South Asians who had decided that armed revolutionary uprising was the solution to routing the British colonial government in India. This movement's importance arises less from the actual threat it posed to the colonial regime and more in relation to the global system of circulating ideas and people which emerged simultaneously with the Ghadar movement. The system of movement of individuals and revolutionaries to North America remained essentially unchanged until the 1970s. Furthermore, many lessons learned in publishing party propaganda through small print free newspapers in both the United States and Canada today function as providing news, serialized literature, and poetry to diasporic South Asians in English as well as numerous so-called vernacular languages. While at the height of its activities, the *Ghadar* party also acted as an intellectual engine that openly and freely combined aspects of Western rationalism with more traditional systems of South Asian thought. Its crystallization in the United States was possible due to a combination of a political environment which was, to borrow



a coinage from Maia Ramnath, at its “zenith” in terms of openness to radicalism [7], plus the presence of individuals who were able to capitalize upon the immigrant South Asian laborers’ frustrations with exploitation and racial discrimination.

Shortly before the turn of the twentieth century, South Asians began to migrate across parts of the British Empire as soldiers or migrant laborers. Both routes were open for a limited number of men coming to both Canada and the United States; indeed, many of the laborers present at the time had in the past served in the British Military. [1, 2, 4, 6] Some of the early seeds of the revolutionary activities of the *Ghadar* movement were germinating amongst this group prior to 1913. Puri gives three interrelated and mutually reinforcing reasons for the political awakening migrants to Canada and the United States experienced. [9] First, there was the ever increasing resentment and hostility that mainly British elites expressed routinely. This led to widespread prejudice and oppression. Following the recession of 1907 in Canada, the environment worsened and South Asian migrants were often physically attacked. Second, the degree of marginalization and ostracism experienced led to the development of a nascent notion of an exclusionary ethnic identity. This can be seen in concerns about Sikhs who even prior to arriving in Canada would shear their hair and don hats in the hope of better acclimatizing to their new societies. Lastly, it would seem that the combination of these two factors in conjunction with what many of these migrants perceived as a greater degree of wealth and freedoms than they had previously experienced led to a burgeoning nationalism directed against the British presence in India. [8, 9, 12]

Despite the emergence of the above mentioned factors leading to the political awakening amongst Punjabi laborers working on the Western Coast of North America, many of them remained loyal to the British. This continued loyalty may have been due to the majority of them being Sikhs who were likely to have served in the colonial military. At the same time, these men were able to garner support from parts of the majoritarian population. The ability to draw on such support may have also lessened the potential for hostility toward not only the majoritarian population but also the

machinery of colonialism that produced much of the ill feelings regarding the Punjabi presence on the West Coast. Several factors assisted in maintaining Punjabi loyalty. For instance, at the level of rhetoric, the martial tradition of the Sikhs and its continued service to the crown was most frequently used as leverage in letters of petition or memoranda on both sides of the political and racial divide. [8, 9, 12] Furthermore, the stamina, earnestness, and low cost of maintaining these laborers were appreciated by their employers. The ability to work long, hard hours and survive with very little expenditures enabled many of these intrepid individuals to save large amounts of capital and invest it in their own farms and factories. [1, 4, 6] Thus, there was a contingent of Punjabi laborers present that was relatively financially stable but nonetheless faced many of the same discriminatory practices. [8, 9, 12] As many of these men were motivated by the opportunity to gain a certain degree of wealth, factors such as these may have assisted in dampening the force of the discrimination that Punjabi men faced daily by providing them hope for the attainability of their goals, achievable.

During this same period, many young and promising South Asian students would increasingly begin to choose American postsecondary institutions to pursue their educations. Most seem to have arrived in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the United States, which were experiencing a period of rapid industrialization and economic prosperity. Not only did this migration generate increased levels of wealth, but there was also an increased interest in a variety of political ideologies and greater investment in education. Many of the South Asian students that arrived rapidly involved themselves in exploring and participating in the political atmosphere and openness for intellectual debate. Studying at New York schools, South Asians formed the earliest known political organizations and generated their propaganda with the assistance of Irish nationalists. These students also interacted frequently with political radicals from South Asia who were also arriving to participate in America’s cosmopolitanism. On the West Coast, a political exile named Ramnath Puri began some of the earliest known

militant nationalist organizing endeavors by creating Hindustan associations and began publishing materials such as the English language “Free Hindustan” and, in Vancouver, the Punjabi language “*Swadesh Sevak*.” While the English papers were mainly geared toward the upper-middle-class South Asian students, and more generally toward the broader, politically engaged Caucasian American, the *Gurmukhi* paper was effectively seditious as it targeted the Punjabi Sikh’s feelings of helplessness and resentment. This added fuel to the latent feelings of disaffection that Punjabi migrants were experiencing. Thus, these previously disparate groups of South Asian migrants began to forge ties in the closing portion of this period of gestation. [9, 10, 12]

The years 1912 and 1913 would prove foundational for the *Ghadar* movement in many ways. In Vancouver, the arrival of *Giani* Bhagwan Singh would infuse the already politicized atmosphere in British Columbia with additional furor. Prior to his arrival, Vancouver was fast becoming a center for seditious activity against the British Indian government before it was eclipsed by San Francisco. The *Khalsa Diwan* Society and United India League in Canada had been agitating on behalf of the laborers’ concerns and had been effective in increasing both solidarity amongst the small community and animosity toward the British. Bhagwan Singh was well traveled and had spent time as a priest in the Hong Kong and Federated Malay States Sikh communities. His oratory was of great repute, and he is the first known Sikh *giani*, or priest, to deliver sermons with revolutionary sentiment in Sikh Gurdwaras in Canada. These sermons were permeated with such fervor regarding revolution against the British because he had been heavily influenced by the growing sentiments toward the need to oust the British Indian government. He commonly used instances from Sikh history to hearken back to the “heroic” military past and legendary sovereignty that Sikhs had attained under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He further enhanced the legitimacy of his claims through the use of selections from the Sikh scripture, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, as well as the war poetry of the tenth guru, Gobind Singh. Eventually, the nationalist *giani*’s revolutionary

concerns became alienated from the needs of Canadian Sikh community, and his ability to incite revolutionary sentiment in his audiences lessened. More immediate concerns, such as the difficulties South Asian laborers were having with Canadian discrimination and legal restrictions imposed upon entry into the country, which were being contested in the Canadian courts during the same years, may have impacted a reduction of interest in revolution. [1, 4, 9, 12]

While the ability to express political dissent was quite limited in Canada, the environment was more open to dissenters against British Imperialism in America partially due to the increasing global prominence of the United States during this period. However, unlike Canada, there was very little interest in international politics or revolution amongst South Asians in the United States. While this statement could be applied generally to both student and laborer groups, it was more often the case that laborers were apathetic to dissenting against the British presence in India. A few politically oriented students were thinking of ways to create connections with the laborers, who were present in much larger numbers than students at this time, in order to politicize them toward revolution. Students began setting up political organizations as early as 1908. During this year, Taraknath Das was a student at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he would ultimately earn both B.A. and M.A. degrees. During his time on the West Coast, he established a circular entitled “Free Hindustan” and in his free time would preach revolutionary ideals to the laborers in the area. By 1912, two blocks were being formed. The first was at the University of California, Berkeley, and the second was in Portland. In Portland, students such as P.S. Khankhoje of Wardha, Kanshi Ram, and Sohan Singh Bhakna were forming the Indian Independence League. Also at this time, Taraknath would relocate to Berkeley in order to join other activists there. The initiative to create links between students and laborers was given a boost after 1910, when many groups of South Asian laborers were attacked by groups of Caucasians. Although they took their concerns to the British Consul in California, there was little done to protect or even acknowledge the threat posed to

the laborers. The inability of the British to respond to this issue only served to enhance the feelings of isolation and helplessness on the part of Sikh laborers. It also re-affirmed the emptiness of the official British rhetoric regarding the value and importance of Sikh in the empire. After this event, the level of antagonism increased greatly and fed directly into the revolutionary aspirations of the fledgling student political groups. Individuals like Jwala Singh, Wasakha Singh, and Santokh Singh made vows of sacrifice for their country's quest for sovereignty in a 1912 meeting and would subsequently uphold these pledges by becoming prominent leaders in the *Ghadar* movement. [9, 12]

It is virtually unanimously agreed upon that the arrival of Har Dayal in the United States in 1911 was the last event that would enable the formation of the *Ghadar* movement. Har Dayal was from an upper-class family in Delhi and studied on scholarship in Lahore, where he took an M.A. in English and an M.A. in History. With these qualifications, he was able to travel to England to study further at Oxford. His stay in England during the years 1905–1907 appears to have fundamentally changed his disposition and goals in relation to his education and also giving him a new sense of asceticism. In a recent article, Harjot Oberoi articulates how Har Dayal began to refuse all food cooked by English people, shunned Western dress in favor of a kurta and dhoti, began to sleep on the floor, and became a vegetarian. [8] Harish Puri tells of his intent on founding a new religion, a confraternity based on atheism, cosmopolitanism, and moral law. He also turned inward by developing a preference for secluded meditation. [9] Dayal's newfound desire to emulate the modality of a traditional Indian holyman was coupled with an interest in reason and rationality, as well as an interest in the militant ideas of individuals like Shyamji Krishna Varma, V.D. Savarkar, and Madam Bhikaji Rustom Cama, who believed that a series of attacks against the British could be achieved by an intense, consciousness-rousing, propaganda campaign. Upon his arrival in the United States, Dayal would travel across the country from New York to Hawaii, where he spent some time in meditation. In September 1911, he returned to California where

he associated himself with students on the Berkeley campus to help found the *Ghadar* movement.

There are several different accounts of the founding of the *Ghadar* Party; however, all accounts agree upon Har Dayal's role in posing the idea for creating a group interested in promoting armed revolt against the British. One such account relates the initial creation of a Hindi Association in Portland in May of 1913 after a meeting of Hardayal with student radicals. At this meeting, it was decided to use Sikh *Jat* laborers for the cause of national sovereignty as opposed to their traditional employment in the British Military. It was further decided that propaganda and reformist education was needed to convert these men to the revolutionary cause while staying free of conflict with the United States government. In October, after having raised funds in support of their cause amongst the more affluent laborers and independent farmers, the *Ghadar* Party headquarters, named "*Yugantar Ashram*," were founded by Har Dayal, Sohan Singh Bhakna, and Pandit Kanshi Ram at 436 Hill Street in San Francisco. The *Ashram* would operate as a printing press, nerve center, and hostel for student radicals such as Raghubar Dayal, Kartar Singh Sarabha, and Harnam Singh "Tundilat." These students felt that they, as Har Dayal's compatriots, sympathizers, and organizers, formed the core of the *Ghadar* Party, whereas their Sikh brothers who labored were to play the role of donors and soldiers. Between 1913 and 1918, the party would include amongst its prominent leaders Maulvi Muhammad Barkatullah, Bhagwan Singh, and Ram Chandra Peshawari. To distinguish itself from organizations like the *Khalsa Diwan*, the Ghadarites settled upon a decidedly secular and political orientation. While Har Dayal assuredly acted as a catalyst to these events, his stay in America ended in April 1914 after he had been arrested for his political activities. After this time, his involvement in the initiatives of Ghadarites was limited to periodic moral support. Eventually, he would turn from the radical ethos and begin to advocate the need for reform within the British colonial system. [8, 9, 12]

The propaganda campaign began with the publication of the *Ghadar* newspaper in Urdu, which

was quickly followed by a translation into Punjabi in the *Gurmukhi* script. Within a few months, it was circulated globally in Canada, Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, China, South and East Africa, and several other places where Indian migrant workers had settled. The paper sought to rhetorically call for the need for an armed revolution by characterizing British rule as an exploitative plague and as an ulcer that was draining away vital raw resources and material wealth from the people of India. In an article entitled, *Propaganda of the Ghadar Party*, Mark Naidis analyzes the rhetoric of the party newspaper's five key usages of propaganda. These are the following: (1) appealing to nationalist groups within the Empire; (2) linking their sentiments with the American tradition of democracy and freedom; (3) targeting organized labor through appeals to the "drain theory" and calls for solidarity; (4) highlighting the violence of Empire, such as violent events in Amritsar, to play upon humanitarian sympathies; and (5) appealing to morality and ethical ideals, such as prohibitionist and suffragist sentiments, by highlighting British promotion of alcohol consumption in the colonies by natives and the efforts of radicals to improve the status of Indians over and above British efforts to the contrary. [7, 9]

The arrival of the Great War was taken as an opportune moment for the large number of migrant workers and students continued to be politicized by the *Ghadar* propaganda campaign to return to India in order to violently oust the British from India. However, the British authorities had prepared themselves for possible seditious activity from returning workers. An elaborate system of inspection of individuals returning to India from abroad was articulated in the "Ingress in India Ordinance" of 1914. Policemen had also been given instructions to keep surveillance on the returned Ghadarites. These efforts returned mixed results as some revolutionaries were arrested while others slipped through. However, the ordinance did effectively disrupt the plans that had been hatched by revolutionaries in advance. The efforts of the Ghadarites were frustrated further by a large degree of apathy toward the need to revolt against the British amongst the

laity and elite in Panjab. Largely ineffective in their last ditch attempts to appeal for revolt amongst soldiers, and even to reach out to the Bengali terrorist groups, the *Ghadar* movement was effectively curtailed without major violence when the police raided the *Ghadar* headquarters in February 1915. The only lives lost were Indian. [9, 12]

The party did continue up until 1947, both in India and in North America, but it suffered from factionalism and ideological shifts from the original anarchist bent of its founders. The Ghadarites also suffered a loss of confidence in America due to the heavily publicized "Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial" in 1917. In a study of the Ghadar Party's organization, Harish Puri asserts that, unlike the Bolshevik proclivity for instigating militant action and organization, the *Ghadar* Party's initiative remained at the level of effective rhetoric for mobilizing nationalist sentiment but was unable to crystallize into effective planning for revolt. He then connects this to what has been construed as a fundamental and, at times, seemingly congenital division between the urbane student literati ideologues and peasant factions with the fault being attributed to the inability of peasants to organize outside of traditional modes where the only cement bonding them is emotional commitment to common goals and to one another. [10] Maia Ramnath has recently upheld Puri's distinction between, in Gramscian terms, "professional intellectuals" and "organic intellectuals" while adding a further regional bifurcation to this schema by stating that the two *Ghadar* factions were a Bengali *Ghadar* of professional intellectuals and a Punjabi *Ghadar* comprised of organic intellectuals. [11] Where the first was fully modernized and drew on international leftist ideals and Western rational education, the other was traditional with an intellectual base comprised of Sikh priests and political awareness based on lived experience rather than learned ideology. Harjot Oberoi has sought to challenge this incommensurable divide by focusing upon the *Ghadar* Party's anarchist leanings and drawing upon the immigrant experience on the Pacific Coast as opposed to the modernist and postcolonial focus on the *Ghadar* Party as a nationalist [Puri] or nationalist anticolonialist

[Ramnath] movement. Oberoi fleshes out a kind of “alternate cosmopolitanism,” as expounded by Akhil Gupta, where an alternate form of nationalism was developed based on the unity between inner and outer, where the inner spiritual and cultural [Indian] and the outer national and political [British], functioned harmoniously at the levels of both rhetoric and everyday life. [8] By drawing attention to its anarchist genealogy, Oberoi construes the *Ghadar* movement as an intellectual project that got sidelined by the absorption of the independence movement into communalism and factional politics.

## Cross-References

- [Colonialism](#)
- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Buchignani N, Indra D (1985) Continuous journey, a social history of South Asians in Canada. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto
2. Buchignani N, Indra D (1989) Key issues in Canadian-Sikh ethnic and race relations. In: Barrier GN, Dusenbery V (eds) *The Sikh Diaspora: migration and the experience beyond Punjab*
3. Gupta SK (2007) *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Jivan te Vichardhara*. Panjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala
4. Johnston H (1989) *The voyage of the Komagata Maru: the Sikh Challenge to Canada's colour bar*. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver
5. Josh SS (1970) *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: life of the founder of the Gadar Party*. People's Publishing House, New Delhi
6. Leonard K (1989) Making ethnic choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans. Temple University Press, Philadelphia
7. Naidis M (1951) Propaganda of the Gadar Party. *Pacific Historical Review* 20(3):251–260
8. Oberoi H (2009) Ghadar movement and its anarchist genealogy. *Econ Polit Wkly* XLIV(50):40–46
9. Puri HK. Ghadar Movement: ideology, organisation, and strategy. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
10. Puri HK. Revolutionary organization: a study of the Ghadar Movement. *Soc Sci* 9(2/3):53–66
11. Ramnath M. Two revolutions: the Ghadar Movement and India's radical Diaspora, 1913–1918. *Radic Hist Rev* 92:7–30
12. Singh K (2004) *A history of the Sikhs*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi

---

## Ghaddhar

- [Ghadar Movement](#)

---

## Ghadhar

- [Ghadar Movement](#)

---

## Globalization

- [Transnationalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Gobind Singh (Guru)

Rahuldeep Singh Gill  
California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks,  
CA, USA

## Definition

The tenth and final human Guru of the Sikhs.

## Main Text

### The Last of the Living Gurus

The last of the ten Gurus (founding figures) of the Sikh religion, and, along with the founder of the religion (Guru Nanak), one of the two most revered Gurus. Sikhs idealize Guru Gobind Singh as the saintly warrior (*sant sipahi*) *par excellence*, the model of spiritual depth and martial prowess. He is remembered as the tenth emperor (*Patishahi Dasvin*). His image in popular memory is that of a man with flowing beard, neat turban with plumes (*kalgi*), quiver of arrows with bow over shoulder, and often riding a horse or mantling a hawk. He continues to fire the imagination of pious Sikhs as the ideal of strong personality, egalitarianism, justice, manliness,



warrior spirituality, and poetic ability, a man of vision tenaciously dedicated to victory for the Divine.

Guru Gobind Singh's most important contribution to Sikh history is his elevation of the Sikh community to the *Khalsa* ("sovereign community"), thereby obviating interference of any human leader between the community and God. As a result, after Guru Gobind Singh's life, the community and scripture were elevated to the status of Guru, thereby ending the office of personal Gurus. Two other related accomplishments were the unification of sectarian rivals and dissolution of the important office of local religious leaders (*masands*), which had become entrenched in Sikh culture since the sixteenth century. He also oversaw the establishment of a new initiation ritual, *Khanda Di Pahul* ("baptism of the straight sword"), undergoing which turned Sikh men into battle-ready warriors called *Singhs* ("lions"). Offered below is a reconstruction of the main events of the Guru's life, discussion of the literature produced during his period, and consideration of his legacy.

**Life.** Though the popular date of his birth is 1666, early sources on Guru Gobind Singh's life provide a birth year of 1661 in the town of Patna, when his parents were visiting distant Sikh congregations in what is today eastern India. [9] As a young child he was eventually taken back to the Sikh center in the Punjabi Himalayan foothills to the town known as *Chak Nanaki*. In 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur, visiting Delhi, was executed at the behest of the Mughal Emperor. His grandfather, Guru Arjan, had also been executed in 1606 as imperial and sub-imperial powers continued to be wary of the "state within the state" that the Sikhs had set up. [2]

Before his father's death, Guru Gobind Singh was betrothed to Jito, whom he married in 1677. Together they had three sons: Jujhar (1687), Zorawar (1697), and Fateh (1699). He married Sundari in 1685 to whom his son Ajit was born in 1686. [9] Sahib Devi was another wife, though there is no mention of the their having a child.

Guru Gobind Singh was formally installed as Guru in 1675 and lived at *Chak Nanaki* for about 10 years. As the ninth successor of Guru Nanak,

he was the leader of a community boasting members from Kabul to Kashmir, from the Indus river system across the Gangetic plains. His ancestor, Guru Ram Das, was the first Guru to select his own son to succeed him, and Guru Gobind Singh was the seventh Guru in that lineage of Guru Ram Das's clan, the Sodhis. There were other Sodhi rivals to his authority (from different branches of the family who laid their own claim to office of Guru), who had taken land grants from the Mughal state. Guru Gobind Singh's branch of the family was the mainstream and was the only lineage who had remained antiestablishment. Guru Gobind Singh was eventually able to dominate these sectarian rivals and dissolve the schismatic differences that had plagued the community since the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Guru Gobind Singh was raised in the style of a prince, hunted, and pursued martial exercises. The local, non-Sikh rulers around *Chak Nanaki* asserted their authority over the town, asking for tribute. Political expedience caused Guru Gobind Singh and his troupe of warriors to leave *Chak Nanaki* in 1685 and set up his establishment at a town called Paonta on the banks of the *Yamuna* river. In 1688, the Guru and his army engaged in battle in assistance of their host at Paonta at a place called Bhangani. Victorious and confident, they returned to *Chak Nanaki* shortly thereafter. In 1689, Guru Gobind Singh founded the town of Anandpur ("town of bliss") where he held court as a political and religious leader. He constructed forts in all directions around the town for protection, took greater steps to strengthen his military might, and asked for weapons and cash in tithe, according to extant letters to his faraway congregations. [9]

The other political entities in the local vicinity, the Rajput chiefs of the hills, were known to have been taking on the title "*Singh*" (lion) in the seventeenth century. [9] Guru Gobind Singh also seems to have added this title to his name at the time of his installation as Guru. The Rajput hill chiefs were not comfortable with the increasing military power of the Guru and his town. He had several advantages over his rival rulers in the hills: (1) the community's trans-regional presence allowed the Guru to pull resources from farther

away than the other kings (there were Sikhs all over India by this point, they were very successful in trade, and there is record of his writing to them for resources like his father and grandfather did); (2) the Sikh idea of divine rule via Sikh polity goes back to the religion's founding and Guru Gobind Singh was able to establish it in his locality; and (3) the Sikh dream of territorial expansion also had at least a century-long history by his lifetime. Moreover, Guru Gobind Singh's ability to quash the power of rival claimants *within* the community went far beyond what other Gurus had been able to do by that point, resulting in a stronger and broader trans-local resource base than the hill chiefs could ever dream of accomplishing.

At the battle at Nadaun in 1691, the Guru's forces assisted a hill chief against the Mughal imperial army. After the battle, the chief paid tribute to the Mughals anyways, thereby assenting to their authority and offending the desire for sovereignty on the part of Guru Gobind Singh.

In the 1690s, Anandpur developed into a flourishing town where the Guru patronized writers, artists, and soldiers. Even an external imperial source in nearby Sirhind took uneasy notice of gathering crowds at Anandpur in 1693. [9] Sikhs from all over North India would have come to Anandpur on *Vaisakhi* and *Diwali* to pay tribute to the Guru. The Sikhs also created the festival of Sikh martial prowess called *Hola Mohalla* around the celebration of Holi, celebrating the end of winter. The Guru's activities at Anandpur would not have been well taken by his rival rulers in the vicinity.

In 1696, the Mughal Prince Muazzam (and eventual Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah) interacted with chiefs in the area and rebuked them for rebelliousness. In the same year, the Sikhs and Mughal forces engaged in a battle. Around this time, Guru Gobind Singh also established control over the important Sikh town of Amritsar after the death of a sectarian rival of the Sikh Gurus (Hariji). Amritsar had been lost to the mainstream community in the 1630s due to Mughal interference. In addition to his letters to congregations asking for contributions in the form of a tithe, the Guru also sent out epistles for Sikh warriors to arrive at Anandpur fully armed.

The crowning achievement of the Guru Period in Sikh history was the institution of the *Khalsa* and its elevation to Guru. At some point in the late 1690s (most Sikhs believe it was 1699), Guru Gobind Singh declared the entire community to be *Khalsa*. The *Khalsa* was the new name of the Sikh community during Guru Gobind Singh's reign, signaling its sovereignty from the local Sikh leaders (*masands*) whose powers had become hereditary and thus rivaled the Guru's own. After the institution of the *Khalsa* ideal, each Sikh congregation was to bring its tithe directly to the Guru during festival times, and not in the middling hands of the *masands*. Also, the *Khalsa*, or the community as a whole, was elevated to the status of Guru itself. This began the process of laying down the dual guruship of the *Guru Granth* and the *Guru Panth*.

In a related development, Guru Gobind Singh encouraged Sikhs to undergo the initiation of *Khande Di Pahul*. In the ceremony, all participants drank from the same steel bowl, symbolizing their unity and utter equality. Before hand, a straight sword was used to mix water with sugar while liturgical prayers were said over it to sanctify it. Signaling that the *Khalsa* was the Guru, Guru Gobind Singh himself took the *Khande Di Pahul* from the hands of other Initiates. This event was celebrated in a composition from around 1700 by the poet Gurdas Singh: "Hail, Gobind Singh! Himself Guru and Himself disciple!" Initiates who had partaken in the *Khande Di Pahul* added the Guru's title "Singh" to their names. These Singhs ("lions") were expected to live according to higher standards of conduct and engage in battle on behest of the Guru and community. [13]

The traditional account of the *Khalsa's* inaugural *Vaisakhi* festival depicts the Guru, sword in hand, asking for the self-sacrifice of five of the congregants. The Guru then baptizes the five Sikhs who came forward with water to which his wife had added wafers of sugar and over which scriptural verses had been read. These five Singhs became to be known as the *Panj Pyare*, or the Guru's "five beloved ones." Well established in the Sikh imaginary was the idea that the Divine was present wherever five Sikhs congregated, and

Punjabi culture posits a council of five as a decision-making body for village matters. Thus, five Sikhs represented the *Khalsa*, and the *Khalsa* represented the Guru's (and the Divine's) authority on earth. [13] One of the statements of the day that Singhs still use to greet one another was that the "*Khalsa* belongs to God, and Victory belongs to God."

It seems that with the volunteer energy of the Singhs, plus a professional army, and the resources he had amassed at Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh was able to hold off assaults from other rulers in the area and expand his territories for several decades. Bringing Amritsar back under the mainstream community's control and the buildup at Anandpur signals his intent to establish the *Khalsa's* sovereign domain over much of the Punjab. The Sikhs were challenged, however, in 1704 when the local rulers from the areas around Anandpur sought Mughal help with their pestilent Khalsa neighbors. Under siege, Anandpur was evacuated in 1704. In the melee that resulted, the Guru ended up losing his two oldest sons in battle and his two youngest sons to capture and execution (along with his mother). By January of 1706, the Guru reemerged in a town called *Talwandi Sabo* in the southern Punjab where he eventually picked up negotiations with the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and arranged to meet him (see *Zafarnama* below). This is the site of one of the main pilgrimage sites associated with the Guru today, the gurdwara called *Damdami Sahib*.

By the following year, the Guru accepted Emperor Aurangzeb's invitation to negotiate the re-habitation of Anandpur and left *Talwandi Sabo* for the Deccan peninsula. The aged emperor died in February of 1707, and the Guru assisted his heir apparent Prince Muazzam at the battle of Jajau in June of that year. The prince ascended the Mughal throne to become Emperor Bahadur Shah and met with the Guru in July in the Mughal capital city of Agra. Contemporary sources report that the Guru was fully armed when he met with the emperor and received a robe of honor from the Emperor. The Guru and his retinue traveled with the Emperor's army to the Deccan Peninsula where Bahadur Shah was keen to put down unrest in the southern territories. While in the Deccan,

stationed in a town called Nanderh, the Guru succumbed to wounds inflicted by an assassin. Before his death he had sent a soldier named Banda Singh back to Anandpur to prepare the *Khalsa* for the re-habitation of the Sikh town. The Guru never survived to see that historical event.

Before his death, Guru Gobind Singh had declared that any person who sought the Guru's authority should find it in the teachings of the scripture. The *Khalsa* had already been established as the mantle of the office of the Guru. Banda Singh, a charismatic warrior in his own right, led wings of the *Khalsa* army in rebellion against Bahadur Shah's forces for several years before he was captured and executed. Mata Sahib Devi and Mata Sundari, the Guru's wives, both wrote to the congregations and conducted affairs on behalf of Sikh communities. [8] No serious claims were ever entertained for the human succession of Guru Gobind Singh's office.

**Literature.** Unlike his predecessors, Guru Gobind Singh did not contribute to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture, indicating that he saw that canon to be closed. Nor do any compositions of the period utilize the pen name "Nanak" as did the compositions of his predecessors. In fact, before Guru Gobind Singh's reign as Guru, the Sikh scripture had reached its final, canonical status. During his lifetime it was referred to as the "*Granth*" (or holy book) and was also referred to as "Guru" in a manuscript dated to 1697. This means that when he died in 1708, the concept that the *Granth* would hold the supreme authority in the community had solid footing. Whereas his predecessors utilized the title *Mahala* ("house for the divine word") in the epigraphs of their compositions, no compositions of Guru Gobind Singh's period are marked in this way. Many of the period's compositions are instead written under the heading *Patishahi Dasvin* ("the tenth emperor"), but it is not clear whether this means they are dedicated *to* him or written *by* him. Whether or not he in fact composed any of the works made available from manuscripts of the time is made difficult to verify by a preponderance of literature sponsored at his court. [9]

Anandpur, and Paonta before that, was home to a vibrant literary scene under Guru Gobind Singh's patronage. Extensive liturgical hymns were combined with performative literature for entertainment in anthologies that date from the tenth Guru's reign. What is today known popularly as the *Dasam Granth* is a compilation of several smaller books compiled earlier like the *Charitropakhyan Granth* ("Anthology of Tall Tales" 1696) and the *Bachitar Natak Granth* ("Anthology of Wondrous Deeds," 1698). Included in the *Bachitar Natak Granth* was a composition known as *Krishna Avatar* ("Descent of Krishna," dateable to 1688). The *Dasam Granth* was once known as *Dasven Patshah Ka Granth* ("The Tenth Master's Book") and is distinct from another major anthology, constituting over 1200 printed pages, known as the *Sarbloh Granth* ("Book of the All-Steel," 1698). These anthologies include a hodgepodge of diverse kinds of texts, including romances, and other stories seemingly meant for the peacetime entertainment of soldiers.

The composition known today as *Bachitar Natak* (once known as *Sarab Kala Ki Benati*, 1698) was written as if it were autobiographical, traces the Guru's incarnation as the result of a divine command. The text purports that the Guru's previous identity was *Dusht Daman* ("destroyer of enemies") and he was a recluse who meditated in the high peaks of the Himalayas. In the early twentieth century, Vir Singh and other Sikh reformers sought to find the place described in the text and settled on what is today Hemkunt. Up in the glaciers of Uttaranchal in India, thousands of Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike make pilgrimage to this place, though the official gurdwara management body does not recognize it as a place of historical significance.

Also included in the *Dasam Granth* are liturgical compositions like the *Jaap* (pre-1685) and the *Zafarnamah* (post 1698), which is an "epistle of victory" from Guru Gobind Singh to the Mughal emperor rendered in verse. [9] Other texts are mentioned in contemporaneous sources, but are not extant. [12] *Shabad Hazare* ("the many-faceted word") is a composition that Sikhs attribute to Guru Gobind Singh. The text resembles the other

Gurus' compositions in the *Guru Granth* because each of its stanzas is identified with a musical measure in the Hindustani system. There is evidence that several of the compositions were recited in the *Khande Di Pahul* ceremony during the Guru's lifetime. [9]

Distinct from the anthologies of the period is a genre of literature dealing with the normative conduct (*rahit*) of the Sikhs. Two statements of conduct from the mid-1690s are attributed to one Nand Lal, an important Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh's period. In one of these two texts, the *Tankhahnama* (1690s) is written in a question-and-answer form with extensive prologue that details how Sikhs sought clarity on ethical issues from the Guru. Prahlad Singh's *Nasihatinama*, also dateable to 1695, ends with the proclamation that the *Khalsa* belongs to God and so does victory. It assures the reader that the Guru will assist that *Khalsa* in gaining sovereignty. [9] Another highly important text from the period is Chaupa Singh's 1700 code of conduct. Finally, *Prem Sumarag* ("the high path of love") is an extensive code dealing with life-cycle rituals and political conduct whose precise dating eludes scholars today, but has been placed during Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime. As the title of the *Prem Sumarag* alludes, love and moral discipline went together, and love (*prem*) is a micro-theme of some of the literature from Guru Gobind Singh's time.

One of the most important sources for the life and times of Guru Gobind Singh is the poet Sainapat, whose *Sri Guru Sobha* (largely written between 1685 and 1698) is a poetic, contemporaneous chronicle of some of the main events of the Guru's life. In Sainapat's retelling, Guru Gobind Singh's life was punctuated by a series of battles, minor and major, and dedicated to establishing the Sikh community's unity and sovereignty from external tyranny. Sainapat offers vibrant retellings of the Guru's battles and also is the most important source for understanding the elevation of the community to the *Khalsa*. Guru Gobind Singh's negotiations with the Mughal emperors are detailed as is the Guru's teaching that his posthumous form will be available in the *Khalsa* and in the scriptural text. Finally, Sainapat announces the community's desire to retake Anandpur. [2]

*Var Bhagauti Ki*, dateable to about 1700 and written by one Bhai Gurdas Singh, sings Guru Gobind Singh's praises for himself becoming the disciple of his community in the straight-sword rites. As in the other texts, the author of this ballad is confident of an immanent golden age to come in which the *Khalsa* shall establish its justice and rule the land over, thereby replacing the Mughal (Muslim) and Rajput (Hindu) rulers that form the status quo. The poet repeatedly refers to the Guru's waving flag, or *Nisan*, and hails the Guru as a *ghazi*, a term usually referred for a holy warrior in the Muslim traditions. No other can bear the sword that the Guru grips, and he will silence the chaos of the ruckus days of war. The Guru is lent divine characteristics, acts as God's agent in the world, and also acts with Guru Nanak's authority. Most importantly, the text calls the readers to initiate themselves at the edge of the straight sword and take the battlefield alongside the Guru, as many valiant and victorious Singhs have done.

In addition to the literature discussed above, Guru Gobind Singh's period also produced a great deal of inscriptional texts and important epistles. Recent scholarship has revealed multiple statements of patronage from the Guru bestowed on important priests in places Guru Gobind Singh and his camp resided in the form of copper plates. Dozens of *hukamnamas* ("letters of decree" or epistles) date from the period and reveal innovation in illumination and orthography of script. Several portraits survive from the Guru's life, as does evidence from a coin struck at Anandpur. One of the Guru's wives, Jito, is the subject of a 1700 petition from a devotee, and the other two wives wrote epistles to communities after the Guru's death. A 1701 letter on the Guru's behest asks fighters to come to Anandpur with their weapons, another asks for smoking pipes to be sent to Anandpur. Copper plates of support and patronage were given to the families of three Hindu shrine custodians in 1679 and 1688. Dozens of copper plates from other hill chiefs to shrine custodians exist from the same time period. Finally, there was an increase in the inscription of scriptural manuscripts during Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime, which only strengthens the

argument that the holy word was the most important text for Sikhs of that period.

**Legacy.** Contemporary sources paint a complex figure of Guru Gobind Singh as a saintly figure, military leader, and patron of the arts. He is remembered as a charismatic and energetic innovator who lent the community his own aura of authority. He had the ability to motivate and summon Sikhs and resources from far and wide for religiously sanctioned battle. His contribution to Sikh history rivals that of the founder, Guru Nanak, and one enamored Sikh of his time calls him "chief" among the Gurus. [9] Guru Gobind Singh possessed the wherewithal to negotiate with two Mughal emperors in letter and person. He was a father whose sons predeceased him in battle and because of capture. He promised his disciples that he would live on in the *Khalsa* and the scriptural word. He assures them that they will retake the land of Anandpur with his posthumous assistance. [13]

A composition that aims to seem autobiographical known as the *Zafarnamah* ("epistle of victory") that is based on a letter the Guru sent to the Mughal emperor, Guru Gobind Singh identifies himself as an "idol breaker," a true monotheist opposed to the idolatrous tendencies of polytheistic India. Elsewhere, literature of the period celebrates the Divine's role in punishing the wicked and rewarding the pious via Guru Gobind Singh. Clearly, the writers of these texts intended to portray Guru Gobind Singh as an instrument of God, and his panegyrists saw him as a face of the Almighty. [2]

And yet there appears to be a pluralist dimension to the poetry produced under his patronage. There are *Braj Bhasha* literary elements in the poetry of his court, and there are references to the martial power of the goddess. Extensive, often gory, tales about the goddess' exploits in mythical battles seem to inspire soldiers and place their actions in the context of a larger cosmic war between the forces of order and disorder. [12] The Guru's letters request chilams and hookahs to be sent probably for the benefit of the Muslims in his armies. [9] Other writings of the period tell us that the Singhs will establish truth for all in a society where Hindu and Muslim rites will be



barred. The general feel of the literature of the period articulates that Sikh religion, called the “third path” (after Islam and Hinduism), is supreme. Where the other religions fit in the Sikh future was still being worked out at the time.

The *Dasam Granth* is one of the most important collections of poetry in the language of Braj Bhasha. [12] It is quite significant that a text of such import in a language of such prestige was created at the Sikh court, no matter its authorship. This means that Guru Gobind Singh was not only a formidable warrior but one of the great patrons of the arts and literature of his time. That he had portraits commissioned by the finest painters of his time, and could support Brahmins with the mark of a copper plate, indicates that he was a ruler and aristocrat of great import.

There have been a number of ways that Guru Gobind Singh has been remembered. From an Indian modernist perspective, he was a great liberator of India from Mughal tyranny and the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur who had also stood up for freedom of conscience against the imperial hegemony. Sikh nationalists like to emphasize that he utilized the ways of the sword only in self-defense, a symbol of God’s justice for which he was incarnated on earth. As such, his life provides them the culmination of the Sikh Guru’s political aspirations, an extension of aspirations to establish Sikh justice and to replace Hindus and Muslims as the legitimate religion to rule South Asia.

The Sikh community’s self-identification as a sovereign community answering to no human authority, and directly only to the divine, is a product of Guru Gobind’s most lasting contribution to the community: the institution of the *Khalsa*. Moreover, the Singh identity has become the ideal in the Sikh community and the ethics of that identity are alive in the Sikh *Rahit*. Many Sikh men continue to keep their unshorn hair under neatly tied turbans, and Sikhs have fought many court battles for their rights to wear arms in the public sphere. The Sikh idea of sovereignty (*Khalsa Raj*) continues to fire the imagination in the global community today. Sikhs celebrate his birthday and the *Vaisakhi* festival when he elevated the community *Khalsa* with much fanfare – holidays exceeded in devotional spirit

only by the birthday of Guru Nanak, the Sikh founder. Sikh pilgrimage to Damdami, Anandpur, Hemkunt, Paonta, Patna, and Nanded testifies to his importance in the Indian landscape. Epithets for Guru Gobind Singh like “plumed one” (*kalgidhar*) and “rider of the blue horse” (*nile ghorhe vale*) kindle the Sikh memory, evoking a loyalty that no other leader has enjoyed among the Sikhs since.

## Cross-References

- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Love \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Persian Sources \(and Literature\) on Sikhs](#)
- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)
- [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)
- [Violence \(and Nonviolence\), Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Gandhi SS (2004) A historian’s approach to Guru Gobind Singh. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
2. Grewal JS (1990) The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, New York
3. Grewal JS, Ball SS (1967) Guru Gobind Singh: a biographical study. Panjab University, Chandigarh
4. Grewal JS, Habib I (2001) Sikh history from Persian sources. Tulika, New Delhi
5. Grewal R, Pall S (2005) Five centuries of Sikh tradition. Manohar, New Delhi
6. Jaggi RS, Jaggi GK (1997) Sri Dasam Granth Sahib. Gobind Sadan, New Delhi
7. Mann GS (2001) Making of Sikh scripture. Oxford University Press, New York
8. Mann GS (2004) Sikhism. Prentice Hall, New Jersey
9. Mann GS (2008) Journal of Punjab studies: special issue on Guru Gobind Singh. Center for Sikh and Punjab Studies, Santa Barbara
10. McLeod WH (2003) Sikhs of the Khalsa. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
11. Richards JF. The Mughal empire. Cambridge University Press, New York
12. Rinehart R (2011) Debating the Dasam Granth. Oxford University Press, New York
13. Sainapati (1967) Sri Guru Sobha. Punjabi University, Patiala
14. Singh S (2007) Guru Bhari: Jivani Guru Hargobind Ji. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala

## Golden Temple

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

## Grace

- [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Groups

- [SECTS \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Guide

- [Rahit-Namas](#)

## Guide (Sikh)

- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)

## Gurbani Kirtan

- [Music \(Sikh Popular and Religious\)](#)

## Gurbani-Keertan

- [Kirtan \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Gurbani-Kirtan

- [Kirtan \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai

Rahuldeep Singh Gill  
California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks,  
CA, USA

## Definition

An important Sikh writer of the early seventeenth century.

## Main Text

### Bhai Gurdas in Context

Gurdas Bhalla (fl. 1600–1630), known to Sikhs as “Bhai Gurdas,” was a Sikh leader and seminal poet of the seventeenth century who played a pivotal role in the articulation of early Sikh thought and ethics. One of his most important accomplishments was to serve as amanuensis and scribe of the *Kartarpur Pothi*, a landmark manuscript of Sikh scripture compiled in 1604. Bhai Gurdas is best known for his poems (40 long poems known as *vars* and over 600 quatrains known as *kabitts*) about Sikh life and spirituality. For these works he ranks among the most excellent and most important poets from Punjab.

A close associate of several of the early Sikh Gurus (ten successive community founders who lived between 1469 and 1708), Bhai Gurdas was raised in Goindval, a Sikh town developed by his uncle (the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amardas). Goindval was well situated on the trade road between Delhi and Kabul, and there is evidence that the town trafficked wood products. There are no reliable dates for his birth. Although many Sikh scholars believe that Bhai Gurdas was born in the 1550s, the span of his career’s work indicates that he was probably born a few decades later than that. Bhai Gurdas surely enjoyed the prestige of being a relative of several of the Gurus, well educated, and highly versed in various languages and religious traditions. The content of his compositions betrays a poet of sophisticated tastes who was probably engaged in travel, trade, or bureaucracy.

Sikh literary tradition was over a century old by the time Bhai Gurdas wrote his *vars* and *kabitts*. Each of the first five Gurus composed extensive poetry for the Sikh scriptural canon, and there were dozens of Sikh poets and bards whose compositions were also canonized. Outside of the canon, a major hagiography of Guru Nanak, or *Janam Sakhi*, had been committed to prose before Gurdas wrote. Bhai Gurdas knew the writings of his predecessors well and alludes to their work several times. He builds on the hagiographical tradition, and his *Var 1* is an often-quoted, poetic retelling of the Sikh founder's life and accomplishments.

Though his poetry was not canonized in the scriptural text, Bhai Gurdas builds on other Sikh poets in the scriptural canon, as well as adds his unique insights into Sikh life. He writes of himself as a bard (*dhadi*), and panegyric (*bhatt*), which by his lifetime were established categories of employment at the Sikh court. Like the Sikh poets Satta, Balvand, and the Bhatts before him, he depicts the Gurus as kings of the spiritual and temporal realms. He also quotes from, and elaborates on, the Gurus' hymns in his poems. Perhaps for this reason his works are considered to be commentaries on Sikh scripture, though they are about Sikh life more broadly.

In 1606, at the assassination of the fifth Sikh Guru by the Mughal state, he was one of the key leaders of the community as a well-trusted relative of the Sikh Gurus. His writings defend the mainstream lineage of Gurus against their sectarian rivals. He played an important role as the mouthpiece of the sixth Guru, the young Hargobind, and probably played a role as guardian of the scion as well. Guru Hargobind continued the practice of his father Guru Arjan to see the Guru-ship as a political entity. Guru Hargobind styled himself a princely ruler, which raised the ire of the nearby administrators and seems to have confused some of his followers who were used to a different style of leadership. Bhai Gurdas writes in Guru Hargobind's defense that he bears a burden than none other could bear, and the true Sikhs demonstrate their unending allegiance.

Receiving the most unkind indignation of Bhai Gurdas's rebukes are the followers of Prithi Chand (d. 1618), Guru Arjan's brother and nephew, a schismatic sectarian group who Gurdas calls "the scoundrels" (*minas*). But other parties did not escape his polemics. For Gurdas, the emperors of this world are cruel rulers who will receive severe punishment in the afterlife. As opposed to the pious (*Gurmukhs*), "heathens" (*Manmukhs*) follow the other religious traditions of the world, and Gurdas is particularly harsh on the devotees of the Hindu god Vishnu and the ascetic followers of Gorakh Nath known as *Jogis*.

He extols his fellow Sikhs to follow Guru Hargobind exclusively and wholeheartedly and denounce other religious leaders. Rival claimants were a problem for Sikhs in previous generations, but Guru Hargobind's sectarian rivals especially threatened the unity of the community at a particularly precarious historical moment: after its leader had been assassinated by the empire. Gurdas's poems of enthusiastic praise of Guru Hargobind were thus an important resource for maintaining the community's integrity in a time of crisis.

One of the most important themes in his works is the virtue of overcoming difficulties and the promise of a brighter future for the Sikh community. Gurdas posits the image of the sugarcane, which undergoes great difficulty in being ground in a press only to produce the sweet sap of cane juice. Anything good, Gurdas argues, must come from difficulty. Moreover, Gurdas promises the community that each community member has the potential to contribute to the great "orchard" that will be the future Sikh community.

Core to Gurdas's value system is the idea that each Sikh must practice the religion's norms with an earnestness that emerges from the heart, enacting the Guru's teachings with an ethic of love. He concedes that the ways of the heart are not easy to perform and the Sikh path is not easy to walk. And yet, he argues, those who walk the path have the Gurus' blessings and the assistance of their coreligionists. The Gurus' teachings provide a "cup of love" from which Sikhs can "drink" by

enacting the teachings, the nectar from which allows them to bear the unbearable difficulties of the times.

The three most important concepts in Gurdas's works are *Guru*, congregation (*sangat*), and scripture (*bani*). His poetry anticipates the bestowal of status of Guru to community and scripture in the eighteenth century. Gurdas also writes about the expansion of the Sikh tradition into a trans-local phenomenon tied to the Punjab region, united by a reverence for the Gurus, scripture, and an ethical code of conduct that ensured membership into that community.

Distinct Sikh sources provide various dates for Gurdas's death, ranging from 1629 to 1637. It is most likely that he passed away in the mid-1630s, and it does not seem that he moved with Guru Hargobind when the Sikh center had shifted to the south of Amritsar and then to the east in the Shivalik hills. All accounts have him breathing his last at home in Goindval.

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Deep DS (2000) *Bhai Gurdas Di Pehli Var: Ik Alochnatmak Ate Tulnatmak Adhian*. Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana
2. Ghuman KS (1983) *Bhai Gurdas: Jivan Te Rachna*. Languages Department, Patiala
3. Jaggi RS (2000) *Bhai Gurdas: Jivan Te Rachna*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala
4. Jaggi GK (1999) *Varan Bhai Gurdas*. Punjabi University Publications Bureau, Patiala
5. Roop HS (1952) *Bhai Gurdas*. Hind Publishers, Amritsar
6. Singh O (1993) *Kabitt Savaiyye Bhai Gurdas, Anukramanika Te Kosh*. Punjabi University Publications Bureau, Patiala
7. Singh D (1997) *Bhai Gurdas: Sikhi De Pahile Viakhiakar*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala

## Gurdwara Reform Movement

Prabhjap Singh Jutla

Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, UK

## Synonyms

[Akali](#); [Akali Dal](#); [Mahant](#); [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)

## Definition

A popular movement among the Sikhs to gain control of their religious shrines from government-endorsed hereditary *Mahants* between 1920 and 1925.

## Introduction

The Gurdwara Reform Movement (GRM) of 1920–1925 was a Sikh agitation to wrest control of Gurdwaras from hereditary, government-approved *Mahants*, who, it was felt, abused their position as guardians of Sikh places of worship. The movement ended with the passage of the Gurdwaras Act of 1925, which transferred the management of Gurdwaras to the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC) and effectively abolished the institution of the *Mahants*. The precise origin of the *Mahants* is unknown. However, some writers have argued that as the job of *Granthi*, or reader of scriptures, became more dangerous during *Mughal* oppression in the late seventeenth century, the guardianship of *Gurdwaras* was passed to various sects like the *Udasis*. These sects did not follow *Khalsa* convention and so could escape persecution. However, it was British rule which institutionalized the *Mahants* because following Punjab's annexation in 1849, all possessions had to be logged with the East India Company.

Significantly, British settlement records did not differentiate clearly between possession by ownership and possession on behalf of a community, which allowed the *Mahants* to treat what were ostensibly public places of worship as their own personal fiefdoms. [4]

## The Origins of Confrontation

Opposition to *Mahants* and their imperial backers began in 1913–1914, when the British demolished the outer wall of the *Rakabganj Gurdwara* in Delhi, so that the road to the viceregal palace could be straightened and the vicinity made more aesthetically pleasing. However, Sikh opposition was rather limited, while the First World War (1914–1918) took the wind out of the conflict. The agitation over *Rakabganj* was not revived again until after the tumultuous events of 1919, which witnessed the Amritsar Massacre at *Jallianwala Bagh*. The *Chief Khalsa Diwan* (CKD) not only failed to condemn the actions of Gen. Dyer, who oversaw the massacre (in fact he was honored by the Golden Temple Management committee), but also failed to secure one-third representation for Sikhs in the Punjab Legislature under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. [1] Those in the CKD which had criticized the government over the *Rakabganj* issue in 1913–1914 now left it in order to form a new political organization called the Central Sikh League (CSL) which demanded greater Sikh representation in legislatures and a program of management reform in *Gurdwaras*. [2]

## New Political Organizations Among the Sikhs

In July 1920, the CSL held a *Diwan* at *Tarn Taran* in which a call was made for Sikhs to come forward and offer their lives in order to rid *Gurdwaras* of the *Mahants*. The small voluntary bands that emerged thereafter did not have a formal name, but were known informally as *Akali Jathas* or immortal groups. The *Akali Jathas* proved to be very successful in taking over

disputed *Gurdwaras*, but were simply not organized enough to form management committees to manage the day-to-day running of *Gurdwaras*. [2] For this reason, the SGPC came into being on 15 November 1920 which consisted of 36 members of an advisory committee formed by the British and a significantly larger number of radical members of the CSL. The SGPC was thus a 175-man committee. [2] Shortly afterwards, Master Mota Singh proposed the formation of a *Gurdwara Sevak Dal*, or army of those in the service of *Gurdwaras*, totalling no more than 500 Sikh volunteers, of whom 100 would be paid workers. This army of volunteers could be relied upon to mobilize against *Mahants* on short notice and agitate for the transfer of control of *Gurdwaras* to the SGPC peacefully. On 14 December 1920, the leadership of the CSL and SGPC discussed the proposal in front of the *Akal Takht* in the Golden Temple Complex and the *Shiromani Akali Dal* (SAD) or Exalted Army of Immortals was born. It has been observed by one writer that while the SGPC possessed the brains, the SAD constituted the muscle of the GRM. [2] Before the passage of the Gurdwaras Act on 1 November 1925, five pivotal conflicts took place between SCPC/SAD and the *Mahants*. Unfortunately for the British authorities, they could do very little to interfere except to advise the *Mahants* to protect “their” properties. In the eyes of the SGPC/SAD, this made the British responsible for anti-Sikh violence by the *Mahants* over the course of 1920–1925. When they did take action, like at *Guru Ka Bagh* and *Jaito*, it was against the SGPC/SAD, which seemed to sever the trust which had existed before the First World War between the Sikhs and their imperial overlords.

## The Nankana Sahib Massacre and Sikh Entry into the Noncooperation Movement, 1921

*Darbar Sahib* at *Tarn Taran* in the Amritsar District was taken over by the SGPC/SAD on 25 January 1921 after an *Akali Jatha* had been beaten up 2 weeks earlier, leading to the deaths of two Sikh volunteers. [3] Mahant Narain Das of *Nankana*



*Sahib* in Sheikhpura District proved to be harder to remove for the SGPC/SAD. When an *Akali Jatha* arrived on 20 February 1921, they were killed, wounded, or burnt by Narain Das and his goons, who were subsequently arrested. After the “Nankana Sahib Massacre,” the *Gurdwara* was handed over to the SGPC on 3 March 1921, who appointed Harbans Singh Atari as President of its Management Committee. [3] The SGPC passed a resolution in May 1921 supporting Gandhi’s Non-cooperation Movement (1920–1922), which in turn brought the GRM to the attention of Gandhi and the revitalized Indian National Congress (INC).

### The “Keys Affair,” 1921–1922

In October 1921 the executive of the SGPC asked Sundar Singh Ramgarhia, the government-appointed manager of the Golden Temple to hand over the bunch of 53 keys of the Golden Temple to the president of the SGPC, Baba Kharak Singh. Ramgarhia deferred to his superior, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, who in turn instructed his subordinate Lala Amarnath to collect the keys from Ramgarhia. The SGPC held protest meetings against this decision and incurred the wrath of the Punjab government in the process. On 17 January 1922, the government backed down, released Sikh protesters from prison unconditionally and duly handed the keys to the Golden Temple to Baba Kharak Singh. The “Keys Affair,” as it came to be known, delighted Gandhi and the INC, who sent a telegram to a bemused Baba Kharak Singh with the message “First decisive battle for India’s freedom won”. [3] According to one historian, the British backed down over the “Keys Affair” as they were afraid of losing support for their regime from loyal Sikhs in the Army and huge numbers of recently disbanded Sikh soldiers in the Punjabi countryside. At a time when Gandhi’s Noncooperation Movement had peaked and enlisted the support of disgruntled Muslims, who had mobilized against the regime in order to protest against the dissolution of the *Khilafat* in the Ottoman Empire; it was prudent for the British to concede Sikh demands.

[3] This strategy would change over the course of 1922, after Gandhi brought the Noncooperation Movement to an end in February 1922, leading to the largest showdown between the SGPC/SAD and the Punjab government.

### The End of the Noncooperation Movement and the Intensification of Government Suppression Against Sikh Reformers

The *Mahant* of *Guru Ka Bagh* in Amritsar district gave in to the demands of the SGPC/SAD in 1921. However, over the course of 1922, the Punjab government instructed him to challenge *Akali Jathas* on his land as trespassers. On 9 August 1922, five members of an *Akali Jatha* who were chopping wood for use in the *langar*, or Gurdwara kitchen, were arrested for theft. This led to outrage within the SGPC/SAD, who responded by sending several *Akali Jathas* to *Guru Ka Bagh* over the next 2 months. On 19 October 1922, 2,450 members of SAD were arrested. However, the turning point came 6 days later when an *Akali Jatha* consisting of Army Pensioners, led by a *Subedar-Major* (Sergeant-Major), arrived at *Guru Ka Bagh*. Fearing the possibility of a Sikh mutiny in the army if a *Jatha* of former soldiers were to be injured in clashes with the government, the Punjab administration instructed the *Mahant* of *Guru Ka Bagh* to pass the management of the *Gurdwara* to Sir Ganga Ram, who in turn handed it to the SGPC on 17 November 1922. [3]

### The Forced Abdication of the Maharaja of Nabha, 1923, and the Beginning of the End of Government Suppression

Government repression of the *Akalis* did not end with *Guru Ka Bagh*. In fact it intensified in the following months. On 9 July 1923, Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha was forced to abdicate by the British in favor of his minor son. It was the *Maharaja* who originally introduced the Anand Marriage Bill in the Governor-General’s

Council in October 1908, which would lead to greater differentiation between Sikhs and Hindus. Furthermore, the *Maharaja* had been an ardent supporter of the Sikh reform program of the CKD and was thought to be sympathetic to the activities of the SGPC/SAD. It was for this reason that the SGPC/SAD now targeted Jaito *Gurdwara* in Nabha state, where an *Akhand Path* or continuous reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* commenced, praying for the restoration of the Maharaja. The government intervened and stopped the reading, which led to another group of *Akalis* arriving to take over the performance of *Akhand Path*. On 12 October 1923, the SGPC/SAD was made illegal and 60 members of the *Morcha* (peaceful march) committee were arrested and charged with treason against the King-Emperor. [3] The pivotal point in the marches from Amritsar to Jaito came on 21 February 1924, when on the third anniversary of the Nankana Sahib Massacre, a special Jatha of 500 *Akalis* arrived at Jaito and were attacked by the Police, watched by 30,000 spectators. In all, there were 100 deaths and 300 injuries. *Akali Jathas* continued to be sent to Jaito until 6 August 1925, by which time 100 and one *Akhand Paths* had been recited there. [3] Support from the INC also began to decline after Gandhi had been released from jail in February 1924. Indeed, Gandhi called for a separation of the religious issue of freedom of worship from the political issue of *Maharajah* Ripudaman Singh's forced abdication. This suited the Punjab government very well, who now sensed they could bring things under control without losing face with Indians.

## The Gurdwaras Act, 1925

For this reason, the government introduced a *Gurdwaras* Bill on 7 May 1925, which was approved on 7 July 1925 and came into force on 1st November 1925. The *Gurdwaras* Act of 1925 recognized the SGPC as the only legitimate body to administer Punjab's *Gurdwaras*. [3] Access to the vast financial resources of Punjab's *Gurdwaras* allowed the SGPC to surpass the CKD in

socioreligious reform, while its political arm, the *Akali Dal*, was now better resourced than the CSL to advance a Sikh agenda in Punjab politics.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Akali](#)
- ▶ [Akali Dal](#)
- ▶ [Akhand Path](#)
- ▶ [Amritdhari](#)
- ▶ [Amritsar](#)
- ▶ [Chief Khalsa Diwan](#)
- ▶ [Ghadar Movement](#)
- ▶ [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- ▶ [Khalsa](#)
- ▶ [Punjab](#)
- ▶ [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#)
- ▶ [Singh Sabha](#)
- ▶ [Sri Akal Takht Sahib](#)
- ▶ [Tat Khalsa](#)

## References

1. Barrier NG (1990) Sikh politics in British Punjab. In: O'Connell JT, Israel M, Oxtoby WG (eds) *Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century*. University of Toronto, Toronto
2. Fenech L (2000) *Martyrdom in the Sikh tradition: playing the 'game of love'*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
3. Grewal JS (1990) *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
4. Singh K (1999) *A history of the Sikhs. volume 2: 1839–1988*. Oxford University Press, Delhi

## Gurgaddi

Randeep Hothi  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

Seat of the Guru

**Gurgaddi, Table 1** Chronology of major events regarding the transfer of gurgaddi

Guru	Birth	Receiving gurgaddi	Date of death
Guru Nanak	April 15, 1469	n/a	September 22, 1539
Guru Angad	April15, 1504	July 14, 1539	March 29, 1552
Guru Amar Das	May 5, 1479	March 29, 1552	September 1, 1574
Guru Ram Das	September 24, 1534	September 1, 1574	September 1, 1581
Guru Arjan	April 15, 1563	September 1, 1581	May 30, 1606
Guru Har Gobind	June 14, 1595	May 25, 1606	March 3, 1644
Guru Har Rai	January 30, 1630	March 8, 1644	October 6, 1661
Guru Har Krishan	July 7, 1656	October 7, 1661	March 30, 1664
Guru Teg Bahadur	April 1, 1621	March 20, 1665	November 11, 1675
Guru Gobind Singh	December 22, 1666	November 11, 1675	October 7, 1708
Guru Granth	n/a	October 7, 1708	n/a

Gurgaddi is the institution of guru-ship that began with Guru Nanak and now continues with the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak’s becoming Guru is generally attributed to a period of time in which he was around 30 years of age. However, hagiographical accounts tend to attribute being Guru to Nanak in early age, leaving an ambiguity as to how and when Guru Nanak occupied the gurgaddi. Guru Angad Sahib is the only Guru to have been transferred the *gurgaddi* while his predecessor remained living. [1] For a chronology of the transmission of *Gurgaddi*, see Table 1.

The earliest accounts of the transfer of gurgaddi are found in the works of Bhai Gurdas, contemporary of the gurgaddi being occupied by Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, and Guru Hargobind. In the first chapter of his composition known as *Vaaran* Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Gurdas describes the transferal of the *gurgaddi*. [3]

During his life time he waved the canopy of Guru seat on the head of Lahina (Guru Angad)

He merged his own light into him

This mystery is incomprehensible for anybody that awe-inspiring (Nanak) accomplished a wonderful task

He converted (his body) into a new form

It was the same frontal mark, the same canopy on the head and the same true throne was based

He had in his hand the seal of Guru Nanak, and proclamation was made in the name of Guru Angad.

The explicit identification of Guru Nanak with subsequent gurus continues throughout the Guru Granth Sahib. The gurbani composed by each guru refers to the self as Nanak. In this way, Gurgaddi is considered not only the authority and institution of guru-ship but also the identity of the Gurus.

**Cross-References**

- ▶ [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Guru](#)
- ▶ [Guru Amar Das](#)
- ▶ [Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai](#)
- ▶ [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- ▶ [Har Krishan, Guru](#)
- ▶ [Har Rai, Guru](#)
- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)

**References**

1. Cole O, Sambhi PS (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon Press, London
2. Kohli SS (2007) Bhai Gurdas the great Sikh theologian his life and work. Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala
3. Singh J (1998) Varan Bhai Gurdas. Brahmraj Singh Vision & Venture Publishers, Patiala/New Delhi

---

## Gurmat

### ► Philosophy (Sikhism)

---

## Gurmat Sangeet

### ► Music (Sikh Popular and Religious)

---

## Gurmatta

I. J. Singh

New York University, New York, NY, USA

### Definition

The word *mata* is counsel or a resolution by a people on an actionable matter; the prefix *gur* indicates that the assembly is acting in awareness of and in the name of the Guru. [1] This makes a *Gurmata* binding on all Sikhs, not open to caveats, and no opportunity to cavil or nitpick. It is, effectively, as binding on Sikhs as would be an edict of a Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals from the Chair of Saint Peter, for Roman Catholics.

*Gurmata*: Historically, *Gurmata* derives from proceedings of *Sarbat Khalsa* (a convening of all Sikhs or their representatives) and provides Sikhs with an enlightened instrument of management that personifies participatory self-governance, accountability, and transparency in decision making. A *Gurmata* may speak to any issue, be it social, political, or doctrinal in nature. The application and utility of *Gurmata* in recent years has been sporadic and controversial. [1, 6, 13]

Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith, brought forth the first Sikh community center in Kartarpur. Subsequent Gurus established additional communities across Punjab and other parts of India. Thus was the infrastructure of Punjab and Northwest Territory of the Indian subcontinent built. These far-flung autonomous communities were knit

together by a common system of ethos, practices, and institutions, with *Gurmata* at the core of the decision-making process. *Gurmata*, thus, is a Sikh institution that the Guru founders, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, evolved. [8]

The sixth Guru, Hargobind, merged the life of interiority in most religions, including Sikhism espouse and the needs of a community that was not reclusive but sociopolitically active within the larger framework of India. His doctrine of *Miri-Piri* consolidated the Sikhs' temporal and spiritual needs. [3] The essential imperative, then, mandates the worldwide Sikhs to act on temporal issues in awareness of and guided by their spiritual heritage. Signifying this principle, two structures were constructed in close proximity of each other: the *Harmandir* and in its shadow, the *Akaal Takht*. *Harmandir* remains the repository of Sikh spiritual heritage and shuns all other activity; at *Akaal Takht*, all matters of temporal concern are explored, debated, and decided from which all *gurmata* flow. [4, 11]

At that time in history, perennial invasions through the Khyber Pass had plagued India for centuries. Except for most Europeans that came by sea, this is how the Aryans, Afghans, Greeks under Alexander the Great, the Mongol hordes, and many others hurtled into Punjab – to perish, to return, or to stay. It was the growing presence of Sikhs that was able to check these yearly onslaughts by developing a militarily formidable and economically strong, independent territory. Sikh institutions founded by the Gurus played a critical role in this. This is not to deny that the over two centuries of Mughal rule had lent considerable stability to the area, even though rulers had turned progressively intolerant of non-Muslims. In the post-Guru period, Mughals declined while Sikh-controlled independent territories flourished. Ranjit Singh, who ruled with great sagacity, was able to coalesce many regions into a dominant presence under his authority. But, as rulers do, he also undermined many of the smaller Sikh principalities as well as the principles of self-governance that were established by the Gurus. [9]

By the time of the fourth Guru, Ram Das, a tradition had emerged that Sikhs from

communities near and far would assemble twice a year on *Baisakhi* (Alt. *Vaisakhi*) and *Diwali*. They would visit with the Guru and reinforce their communal spiritual ties. With growing sense of the sociopolitical reality around them, these biennial conclaves became the occasions for national conversations for Sikhs to compare notes, derive national priorities, and plan coordinated policies. [3]

The formal practice of *Gurmata* and its genesis are traceable to these biennial conclaves and the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Master. When he inaugurated the *Khalsa* in 1699, he pronounced all Sikhs to be equal and himself as subject to the same discipline and laws as everyone else; matters of caste and status were entirely abolished. Tradition records one instance where Guru Gobind Singh himself was chastised for a possible infraction of the *Khalsa* code of conduct. Another time when the will of the *Khalsa* likely countermanded the Guru's own opinion was at the evacuation of Anandpur in 1705. [15, 17]

History also states that in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh formally decreed Guru Granth as the spiritual authority, while temporal authority rested in the Sikh community, gathered in an awareness of Guru Granth. This seminal idea clearly comes through in two writings: Prahlad Singh's *Rehitnama* "*Guru Khalsa maniyo pragat gura(n) ki deh...*" that the *Khalsa* is the embodiment of the Guru and Giani Gian Singh's writing in the nineteenth century "*Guru Granth ji maniyo pragat guraa(n) ki deh...*" that Guru Granth is the embodiment of the Guru. Doctrinally, both statements are equally true, the former for temporal existence and the latter for spiritual authority. [14]

Both John Foster and John Malcolm give vivid accounts of their respective visits to Punjab in 1783 and 1805 and of the construction and functioning of *Gurmatay*. But their accounts depend on second-hand reporting; neither seems to have seen a Sikh conclave functioning and a *Gurmata* being recorded. Notwithstanding this caveat, their version of how the Sikh community and/or Sikh representatives assembled and acted appears entirely consistent with the unbroken tradition of Sikh teaching and practice. [3, 12]

Malcolm makes several mentions of *Gurmata* and succinctly captures its purpose as "To unite and

act in one body, and on principle, was, with the first Sikhs, a law of necessity". [12] The post-Guru period saw a war torn Punjab where Sikh survival hung in the balance and acting by *Gurmata* assured collaboration in action by Sikhs. K. S. Thapar concludes that "*Gurmata* had emerged as a well established democratic institution towards the middle of the 18th century". [17]

Twice a year, Sikh conclave at the *Akaal Takht* was mandated. In these representative assemblies, Sikhs acted to take stock of political matters, issues of strategy and tactics, and how best to confront a common enemy and select the commanders who would lead them. All those who attended had an equal voice in the deliberations. Once a *Gurmata* was adopted with the congregational prayer (*ardas*), everyone, even those who had vigorously opposed it during discussion, resolved to carry it out without reservation. [1, 6, 8] Any personal differences and private animosities were suspended for the duration of the deliberations and the action resulting there from. Thus was national consensus achieved.

It was in the tumultuous post-Guru period that *Gurmata*, as an instrument of decision making, assumed formal structure. It is instructive to survey some *Gurmata* in history; as historical markers, they bear testimony to the centrality of the *Gurmata* in Sikh society and its life.

In 1726, it was resolved to oppose the government of the time. In 1733 when the government looked to making peace with Sikhs and awarded them a land grant, Sikhs debated the matter at their conclave and with one voice deputed Kapur Singh, a caretaker of horses, to be the recipient of the largesse along with the title of *Nawab*. By 1745, the tide had again turned, and the local satrap decided to wipe Sikhs off the face of the earth. Once again Sikhs, by *Gurmata*, decided to take up arms. In 1747, again by *Gurmata*, Sikhs erected a fort at Amritsar. [2] A *Gurmata* appointed Jassa Singh Ahluwalia the leader and reduced the number of Sikhs groupings to be recognized in Sikh conclave to 11 from 65; it also required that the records of the territories controlled by each group (*misl*) be maintained at the *Akaal Takht*. This is how the 11 *misl*s came into being that later became 12. [2, 9, 16] The



supremacy of the *Dal Khalsa* over all misls was established and a coin minted at Lahore by *Gurmata*. Ratan Singh Bhangu reported a critical *Gurmata* passed to oppose Ahmed Shah Durrani on his seventh invasion of Punjab in 1764. [3] Since membership in misls was open only to *amritdhari* males, it is fair to assume similar criteria for the leadership and for participants in any *Gurmata*.

A very few years later, misls had become powerful and contentious; each wanted to expand its territory and influence at the expense of its neighbors. Naturally, *Gurmatay* fell out of favor. Ranjit Singh soon emerged as the most powerful *misldar* and, with the conquest of Lahore, the master of Punjab. Not wanting competing centers of power around him, he systematically undermined the practice of *Gurmata*. The last *Gurmata* in the nineteenth century considered the request of the Maratha leader Jaswant Rao Holkar for armed assistance against the British in 1805. [1, 6, 8]

Then, 120 years later, in 1925, following a *Gurmata*, Sikhs decided to wrest control of the gurdwaras from British appointed managers. It was not a systematic or complete representation of the worldwide presence of Sikhs, but it was a much needed resurrection of a wonderful idea – one of transparency, accountability, and self-governance. And it was effective.

The history of *Gurmatay* in postindependence India has been troublesome, particularly since 1984. On April 29, 1986, the Indian and Punjab governments convened a *Sarbat Khalsa* at the *Akaal Takht*. Quite unexpectedly, it attempted, by *Gurmata*, to declare the territory of Punjab as the independent nation of *Khalistan*. Since then, no *Gurmata* has been issued from the *Akaal Takht* by the collective body of the Sikhs.

The mechanisms of convening Sikhs for deriving a *Gurmata* were designed for a different world when almost the entire Sikh population was circumscribed within Punjab, with smaller pockets in the rest of India. Now, sizable Sikh communities exist all over the world. There is, at this time, absolutely no provision for representation of women or of any Sikhs from outside India,

even though two to three million Sikhs live in the diaspora outside Punjab and India.

Clearly a more inclusive model needs to be explored; there is no reason why the model of *Gurmata* cannot be adapted for conflict resolution at the regional or local levels worldwide.

Historically, *Gurmata* and *Sarbat Khalsa* are so intimately entwined that understanding either requires us to explore both.

## Cross-References

- [Guru](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Bhagat S (1977) Institution of *Gurmata*. *J Sikh Stud* 4:99–108
2. Bhagat S (1978) Sikh polity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Delhi
3. Bhangu RS (1914) *Prachin Panth* Prakash
4. Dilgeer HS (1980) *The Akaal Takht*. Singh Brothers, Jalandhar
5. Forster G (1970) *A journey from Bengal to England*. Patiala
6. Gandhi SS (1980) *Panth and Gurmata*. *Spokesman Weekly* 29:39
7. Gian Singh G (1974) *Rehatnamey*. In: Kahn Singh N (ed) *Mahaan Kosh* (Punjabi). Languages Department Punjab, Patiala
8. Gulcharan S (1983) *Gurmata*. *Sikh Rev* 32:61–64
9. Gupta HR (1996) *Misls*. In: Harbans S (ed) *The encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, vol III. 93–111 pp
10. Harpreet S (2011) Harvard University, personal communication
11. Kapur S (1976) *Akal Takht*. The Sikh Sansar, California
12. Malcom J (1812) *Sketch of the Sikhs*. Printed for John Murray, Albemarle Street, London
13. Mohan S (1982) Difference between *Gurmata* and resolution. *Punjab Past Present* 16:129–32
14. Prahlad S (1974) *Rehatnamey*. In: Kahn Singh N (ed) *Mahaan Kosh* (Punjabi). Languages Department Punjab, Patiala, Reprinted
15. Rekhi RS (2003) The Sikh institution of *Gurmata*. *J Relig Stud* 34:146–148
16. Singh IJ (2011) *Sikh Misls for the 21st century*. The Sikh Review, Kolkata
17. Thapar KS (1996) *Gurmata*. In: Harbans S (ed) *The encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, vol I. 152–155 pp

## Gurmat-Sangeet

► Kirtan (Sikhism)

## Gurmukh

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Gurmukh literally means, the face of the guru (and by extension, *satguru*). For Sikhs, this generally comes to refer to one who lives according to the guru's teaching or a person who has overcome ego and therefore, whose speech is centred around the Guru's Word, the unconscious Word, the *satguru*.

### Gurmukh: A State of Human Being

The term *gurmukh* is a composite term combining, *guru* and *mukh*; when occurring together the literal meaning provides the basic meaning and departure point for the development of this notion. *Gurmukh* literally means, "face of the guru". [4, 5] However, this is a term that is commonly used in the Guru Granth Sahib as well as the main secondary sources such as the *vaars* of Bhai Gurdas. Through the course of its development the term takes on a number of interrelated meanings whose associations connect with the face of the guru, the act of facing the guru, or one whose face is toward the guru. To put it somewhat differently, the *gurmukh* is a state personifying the affect derived from a sustained encounter with guru or, more specifically, the *satguru*. The *gurmukh* is a kind of illuminated consciousness that has been opened through a pure experience of truth. [1, 2] A *gurmukh* does not have to belong to the Sikh community, it is a term *gurmukh* that refers to a state of consciousness achievable by anyone.

Bhai Gurdas in his *vaar* 3, *paurhis* 13 and 14, describes this as a permanent state associated with having attained a form of knowledge where a space exists for pure truth and pure awareness enacted through an engagement with the (*sat*)*guru* on the way becoming which is *gurmukh*. It is important to state that pure truth and pure awareness are coexisting and arise in an instance wherein the *gurmukh* ideal is brought forth. Such a process occurs outside of ego centered consciousness; it is an act of grace in relation to remembrance of the *shabad*. [3] Thus, the term *gurmukh* is an essential component to the master-disciple relationship at the core of the Guru Nanak's teaching and therefore describes a person engaged with these teachings [2].

*Gurmukh* comes to reflect a state of being human which is associated with a human ideal, the guru, as well as guide for opening an experiential space for *satguru*: the person who maintains a state of *birha* and its attendant balance of separation-fusion, self-other, action-inaction, attachment-detachment in the course of daily life is known as *gurmukh*. [1] The *gurmukh* lives in stark contradiction to the *manmukh* (lit. self-willed). A *manmukh* is one whose existence is self-centred. This person will continually disregard *hukam* (the sovereign imperative that resists being rationalized into a system of knowledge) and in doing so will inscribe ego into his or her being, thereby perpetuating the cycle of attachment to one's own ego. Guru Arjan relates that to become a *gurmukh* one undergoes self-transformation by overcoming the five psychic vices: *kam* (lust), *krodh* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (attachment), *ahankar* (pride). A *gurmukh*'s speech is centered in a practice which results in ego loss. As such, they actively resist saying "I am" and instead balance this egotistical propensity by being able to say "I am not." Thereby, *gurmukhs* elevate themselves beyond the self-willed rationalist morality of societal norms that bear upon the *manmukhs*. Appropriating *hukam* forces the individual to think and act almost like an aesthete or artist. By doing so, the *gurmukh* is freed and empowered to challenge existing

values, freed to create new values rather than blindly following social rules. [2, 3]

The distinction between *gurmukh* and *manmukh* is more than just an ethical one since “ethic” implies some minimal binding to some norm or duty. Rather the distinction implies a freedom from the bindings of the self, which gives rise not to an annihilation of self but to a spontaneity of speech–thought–action. Whether this transition is viewed epistemologically as a shift from duality to Oneness or existentially from *manmukh* to *gurmukh*, the transition itself revolves around the efficacy of the Name (*nam*), or the impossible point of contact between self–other, separation–fusion. Attunement to *nam* constitutes a wordless communication between self and other through which all existent things relate to each other prior to individuation. The *gurmukh* takes us beyond socially sanctioned oppositional norms such as good versus evil, wrong versus right, and violence versus peace by questioning the frameworks we operate within while allowing us to make deliberate, conscious choices. Rather than being a kind of inward mysticism, the idea of the *gurmukh* reminds us of the applicability of the Sikh Gurus’ teachings to all life situations, actual or possible. In an ever-changing world, the *gurmukh* is able to determine how best to live from day to day. [2]

## Cross-References

- [Grace](#)
- [Guru](#)

## References

1. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
2. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
3. Singh J (1998) Varan Bhai Gurdas. Vision & Venture, Patiala
4. Singh H (1998) Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
5. Singh K (1999) Gurushabad Ratnakar Mahankosh. Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Chandigarh

## Gurmukhi Script

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Gurmukhi literally means, “From the Guru’s mouth.” It refers to a northwestern Indic script which is used primarily for writing in the Punjabi language. However, it has also historically been used as a form a mercantile short-hand as well as for writing in the Sindhi and Gujrati languages as well.

### The Gurmukhi Script in Sikh Tradition and the Punjabi Language

The *Gurmukhi* script is a system of Indic writing that predates the early Sikh period; its origins stem from the *Brahmi* script, one of the earliest alpha-syllabic Indic scripts and progenitor of the family of Brahmi scripts. [1–3, 5] However, it is an important script for Sikhs and in Sikh history as it is thought to have been modified and rearranged by Guru Angad in order to preserve the compositions of Guru Nanak; this newly adapted script has been called *Gurmukhi* by Sikhs ever since. The new script helped Angad to consolidate the compositions of Nanak and provided a medium for the composition of his own short verses. Specifically, Angad composed his own verses under the name “Nanak,” indicating that there was no qualitative difference between the poetic consciousness or inner experience of the founder and the successor. [5] This practice was followed by Angad’s successors. The usage of the script spread widely during the period of rule by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. [3] The development of this script was an important step as it allowed the Sikhs to further their own written language and idiom

distinct from Persian (the language of the Mughal empire and of South Asian Islam) and Sanskrit (the language of orthodox Hindus), it acted as an important precursor to the Sikh community's developing sense of distinctness during the colonial period. [4–6]

The *Gurmukhi* script was also essential for the consolidation and standardizing of the Punjabi language primarily during the colonial period. During this period the script was taken beyond its traditional sphere of teaching and usage which was within Sikh *dharamsalas* or *gurdwaras*. [1] However, while *Gurmukhi* spread in to broader spheres of culture, arts, education, and, eventually, administration it was simultaneously coming to represent a linguistic sphere which was exclusively Sikh. Thus, the secular spread of the *Gurmukhi* script is associated with the communal rifts which were behind much of the language politics associated with nationalism and the move toward partition in the early twentieth century. During this period, the main organs for disseminating this modern Sikh world-view to the masses were newspapers such as the Punjabi medium *Khalsa Samachar* and the English medium *Khalsa Advocate*. [5, 6] These publications consistently projected a public image of the Sikhs as a religious community, a separate religious identity, an emphasis on the study of Sikh literature and history, an advocacy of Punjabi language in the *Gurmukhi* script, and a separate marriage system. Thus, this script became a vehicle for the reification of a particular and distinct from of Sikh religious identity around the idea of Sikhism; in doing so it enabled them to participate in the secular politics of nationalism which were developing in the twilight of the colonial period. These included the need for Sikhs to have adequate political representation in the new Punjab, the promotion of Punjabi language in *Gurmukhi* script, and a measure of protection for the Sikh identity through some qualified form of sovereign status within the Indian Union. The relationship between language and identity has been important in the politics of the province post-partition as well leading to the repartitioning of the province and continual calls for better

education grounded in *Gurmukhi* and Punjabi in early primary schooling. [4, 5]

## Cross-References

- [Sikhism](#)
- [Singh Sabha/Reform Movements](#)

## References

1. Bedi TS (1999) *Gurmukhi Lipi da Janam te Wikasa: Bharati pura Lekhan de Sandarabha Wicha*. Punjabi University, Patiala
2. Gill HS (1963) *A reference grammar of Panjabi*. Hartford Seminary Foundation, Hartford
3. Kaur D (2009) *Panjabi bhasha ate Gurmukhi Lipi de Wikasa Kanfaransa*. Punjabi University, Patiala
4. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University, New York
5. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
6. Oberoi H (1993) *Construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Chicago University Press, Chicago

## Guru

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

A spiritual master who takes on disciples. As the word Sikh signifies discipleship, the term guru is important because it is one aspect in the core relationship at the center of the tradition. For Sikhs, this has taken the form of a lineage of ten uninterrupted teachers beginning with Guru Nanak and ending with Guru Gobind Singh. However, the *Adi Granth Sahib*, after its installation in *Harmandir Sahib*, had always been revered as coterminous with guruship and Guru

Gobind Singh made this an uncontested fact by installing the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the final guru. This installation reflects a deeper core to the term guru contained in the Sikh tradition; the guru exists in the word or *shabad*. Through the shabad, a disciple can engage in a process of attaining liberation. Guru is seen as an essential component for the development of humanity.

## Guru in the Sikh Tradition

Sikhs are those who have undertaken a path of self-perfection under the guidance of a spiritual master called Guru (to be distinguished from the lower case “guru” which is traditionally used in India to refer to any respected teacher). [1, 2, 4] For Sikhs, the Guru (upper case) refers to a succession of ten spiritual masters, each of whom played a role in evolving the path of Sikhi and a teaching or philosophy known as *gurmat*. This line of Gurus begins with Guru Nanak and ends with Guru Gobind Singh. But the term Guru, has wider meanings which have been derived from the poetic compositions of the Gurus as embodied in Sikh scripture (*shabad-guru* as *Guru Granth Sahib*), to the teaching or philosophy of the Gurus (*gurmat*) and to the “divine” inspiration behind all of these (the *satguru*). [4]

The term guru is an ancient Indic one that comes from the Sanskrit root *gri*, meaning to make one understand or to engulf. Developing from this root, guru means heaviness or seriousness. When applied to an individual, guru connotes a degree of veneration and importance. In terms of the notions contained within the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the term guru does not bear any connotation of a mediating principle or individual. This means that the guru is not an intercessor who can intervene on a disciple’s behalf to effect spiritual or worldly matters. Neither is the guru meant to be an incarnation, or *avatar*, of god and has no uniquely divine powers. The guru is a principle through which divine knowledge is given to humans who have strayed from this manner of thinking. As such, the guru is one through which this body of knowledge is rekindled in humans; it is through the guru that the possibility of

rekindling is enabled. Part of what this entails is a refashioning of how humans relate to the ego. This rekindling is a process through which one can come to the truth. [1, 2, 5, 6]

While there is no specific early text that conceptualizes the notion of guru, it is clear from the *Guru Granth* and early secondary literature that the more subtle aspects of guru as an idea were developed partly through elaborations on *satguru* (lit. true Guru) and *shabadguru* (lit. word as guru). The term *satguru* indicates that Nanak’s experience did not come from a human preceptor or living guru. Nanak’s writings relate how this experience that came from a nonhuman source found within all humanity. It exists as a potential within all individuals but for many it remains hidden. *Satguru* names this human potential as something which emerges through being attuned to our consciousness. [1, 2, 6] This attunement occurs through considering the relationship between language and consciousness. Therefore, it is key to understanding the nature of spiritual authority for Guru Nanak (as for the *bhaktas* before him). Just before the death of the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, spiritual authority was vested in the *Adi Granth* (henceforth *Guru Granth Sahib*), leading to the doctrine of scripture or Word as Guru (*shabad-guru*). [3]

*Satguru* is quite simply the force immanent within us that creates a change or conversion from ordinary egocentred consciousness to egoless consciousness. The clearest manifestation of such change or conversion is in the nature of the language that we utter, where ordinary self-centred language gives way to egoless poetic language. The Sikh gurus understood this language as a hidden force that arises from a consciousness wherein the production of words is done unconsciously or rather, words over which our everyday consciousness has no control. They emerge from a source other than our self-possessive ego. *Satguru* consists at the same time, of concrete actual Word(s) (*shabad*) plus the silent, hidden force behind it, yet these are not two different things. They are one. This was an important idea as it effectively displaces the need for human mediation in achieving perfection. Instead, the Sikh gurus describe how the sovereign experience



through which poetic consciousness is released becomes the touchstone of all authority. [3, 4]

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Har Krishan, Guru](#)
- [Har Rai, Guru](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Kohli SS (1992) A conceptual encyclopaedia of the Guru Granth Sahib. Manohar Publishers, New Delhi
2. Kohli SS (1996) Dictionary of the Guru Granth Sahib. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
3. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
4. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
5. Singh H (1998) Guru. In: The encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Talib GS (1991) An introduction to the Guru Granth Sahib. Punjabi University, Patiala

## Guru Amar Das

- [Anand Sahib](#)

## Guru Granth Sahib

Pashaura Singh  
Department of Religious Studies,  
University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[The Adi Granth](#)

## Definition

The primary scripture of the Sikhs.

## Living Ebodiment of the Guru

### Introduction

The *Adi Granth* (“Original Book”) is the primary scripture of the Sikhs. It includes the works of the first five Sikh Gurus and the ninth, plus material by four bards (Satta, Balvand, Sundar, and Mardana), 11 *Bhatts* (“court poets” who composed and recited panegyrics in praise of the Gurus), and 15 *Bhagats* (“devotees” of the *Sant*, *Sufi*, and *Bhakti* traditions, including the medieval poets Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, and Shaikh Farid) – a total of 36 contributors stretching historically from the twelfth century to the seventeenth. Sikhs normally refer to the *Adi Granth* as the *Guru Granth Sahib* (“Honorable Scripture Guru”). In so doing, they acknowledge their faith in the scripture as the successor to the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, who terminated the line of personal Gurus before he passed away in 1708, installing the *Adi Granth* as “Guru Eternal for the Sikhs” ([8], p. 659). As such, it carries the same status, authority, and functions, in terms of both of personal piety and of collective identity, as any of the ten personal Gurus of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak (1469–1539) through Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708). Thus, the Guru Granth Sahib has become the perennial source of divine guidance for Sikhs, and it is treated with the most profound respect when it is installed ceremonially in a *gurdwara* (“Guru’s house”). The standard version of this collection contains a total of 1,430 pages, and every copy is identical in terms of the material printed on individual pages.

### Formation of the Sikh Canon

The formation of Sikh canon involved a much more complex process than the tradition would have us believe. In the early Sikh community, the writing of *gurbani* (“inspired utterances of the Guru”) was regarded as a devotional activity. During the last period of Guru Nanak’s life at Kartarpur, there existed a single codex of his writings referred to as a *pothi* (“volume”), in early Sikh literature, which he bestowed on his successor Guru Angad (1504–1552). The updating of this scriptural corpus continued under the care of successive Gurus. In particular,

a four-volume written collection appeared in the form of Goindval *pothis* during the period of the third Guru, Amar Das (1479–1574). The two extant copies of these volumes at Jalandhar and Pinjore provide us with the earliest writings of the first three Gurus and the Bhagats such as Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, and other medieval poet-saints. Their structure reveals that the key organizing principle was based upon ragas, keeping in mind the needs of the performing singers (*ragis*). The *Gurmukhi* script of these two volumes represents the earlier stage of orthography when vowel signs were not yet fully developed. The Goindval *pothis* provided a substantial nucleus for the compilation of the Sikh scripture ([2], p. 47). Bula and Pandha, the renowned scribes and singers of Guru Amar Das's period, prepared anthologies of devotional literature called *gutakas* ("breviaries") and *pothis* for various Sikh congregations (*sangats*). The fourth Guru, Ram Das (1534–1581), provided a new musical dimension to the evolving Sikh scriptural corpus by adding 11 new ragas to the existing system of 19 ragas employed by Guru Nanak for his compositions. Although no manuscript of his works has survived, Guru Ram Das frequently encouraged the professional class of scribes to write *gurbani* for the purpose of distribution among the various Sikh congregations ([9], p. 1015).

The making of the *Adi Granth* evidently owes much to the enormous energies of Guru Arjan who prepared a prototype of the text in 1604, primarily in response to the process of consolidation of the Sikh tradition, taking place within the larger context of doctrinal and institutional developments of his times. He updated the existing collection by substantially increasing it. The cultural environment of Mughal India during Emperor Akbar's reign provided the historical context for the creation of a unified scripture for the Sikh *Panth*. Notably, during Guru Arjan's reign, Ramdasapur (Amritsar) had become the central institution of scribal activity, prioritizing a substantial textual tradition. It provided a safe place known as the *pothi mahal* ("abode of the books") where the sacred volumes were stored with sanctity. It was parallel to the *kitab khana* ("library") of Mughal emperors who were

following a time-honored and valued tradition. To have a great library was considered the sign, perhaps even the function, of a great ruler in the Islamic world. Not surprisingly, the cultural environment of the times reflected a world peopled by calligraphers and illuminators, paper makers and line drawers, and bookbinders and margin markers, also of librarians and superintendents and inventory keepers ([7], p. 138). Emperor Akbar's visit to Goindval on 4 November 1598 was indeed the high point of a cordial relationship between the Mughals and the Sikhs. It provided Guru Arjan with first-hand opportunity to look closely at the accompanying imperial ensemble (*naubat*) and illustrated manuscripts that were displayed as part of the Mughal policy of disseminating information among the people. It is a well-known fact that a group of artists, scribes, painters, and band of musicians always accompanied Akbar. This display of imperial paraphernalia served as a visible sign of authority. It is highly likely that Guru Arjan made up his mind on this occasion to create a prototype of the *Adi Granth* for the Sikh community ([7], pp. 137–141).

The writing of the manuscript MS 1245 (ca. 1599) had certainly begun immediately after Emperor Akbar's visit to Goindval. One of the opening folios of this manuscript bore a *shamsa* (the glorious "sunburst") that had unmistakable links with high Islamicate traditions of manuscript decoration ([7], p. 139). It was certainly drawn by an artist who had prior experience in illuminating Persian and Arabic manuscripts in the city of Lahore – the closest location from Ramdasapur, from where the Sikh scribes normally bought paper and other writing materials. The existence of textual specialists and scribes in turn implied considerable economic resources, including both an organized and wealthy Sikh *Panth* ("community") at Ramdasapur to support such communities of scholars and also wealth to obtain the necessary materials needed for scholarly work, such as properly gathered and prepared sets of paper made in Sialkot and Kashmir to write on, ink, and writing instruments. Ramdasapur had indeed become the hub of preparing and preserving the *pothis* of *gurbani*. The examination of the contents of the available pre-canonical manuscripts of Guru

Arjan's period places them in the following chronological order: MS 1245 (ca. 1599) is the oldest, followed by the *Bahoval pothi* (ca. 1600), the *Vanjara pothi*, the *Bhai Rupa pothi*, and the *Sursingh pothi* ([9], p. 1016). All of these documents predate the Kartarpur *bir* ("recension") which was completed in 1604. They provide traces of documentary evidence to build a framework on the process of canon formation.

Recent research has compelled us to look at the making of Sikh scripture as the result of a "collaborative approach" based upon the "theory of a working Granth in progress" prepared under the supervision of Guru Arjan ([9], p. 1007). This is an approach that duly acknowledges the role played by other human actors in the complex process of canon formation. In this context, Bhai Gurdas is universally regarded as Guru Arjan's amanuensis in the making of the Sikh scripture. In addition, there was Jagana Brahmin, a resident of Agra, who had his own training in the study of Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. He was a devout follower of the fifth Guru and a scribe of repute for "correct" copies of the *Adi Granth*. Both of them were well versed in the various conventions of Sanskrit literature, Braj Bhasha, and the Indian literary traditions. Tradition also records the names of four other scribes – Bhai Sant Das, Bhai Haria, Bhai Sukha, and Bhai Mansa Ram – who were equally involved in the making of the Sikh scripture. Incidentally, there are at least four different handwritings discernible at different places, although the major portion of the Kartarpur *bir* is by the primary scribe. Thus, the preparation of the scripture was the result of teamwork, under the direct supervision of Guru Arjan ([7], p. 137).

A close examination of early manuscripts reveals that Guru Arjan worked on a number of pre-canonical texts to finally produce a prototype of the *Adi Granth* in 1604. The process does not seem to involve a linear mode of operation in any way, copying directly from one codex to another. Rather, a number of codices were being used simultaneously during the redaction process to establish the canon. The texts were read and reread frequently to arrive at the final reading. The whole project of preparing a prototype of

the *Adi Granth* was completed at a peaceful location beside a sacred pool named *Ramsar*, in the central place of Amritsar. The manuscript bearing the date 1 August 1604 is still extant at Kartarpur in Jalandhar district of Punjab, popularly known as the Kartarpur *bir* of the *Adi Granth*. Guru Arjan organized the works of the Gurus, the *Bhagats*, and other bards into a coherent pattern reflecting both doctrinal and musicological perspectives. Indeed, the formal aspects of texts of the *Adi Granth*, including their metrical, poetic, melodic, and linguistic structures, are fully at one with their doctrinal content. All these aspects provide an internal unity to the Sikh scripture. It was ceremonially installed in the *Darbar Sahib* (present-day "Golden Temple" at Amritsar) on 16 August 1604, marking the beginning of a new Sikh liturgy at the central place of Sikh worship.

In spite of Guru Arjan's remarkable editorial achievement in preparing a prototype of the text in 1604, there emerged three different recensions of the *Adi Granth* in the course of time. The principal reason for this development was due to the unstable situation created by Guru Arjan's execution in 1606 under the orders of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. This event became the turning point in the history of the Sikh tradition, creating a new situation that was conducive to sectarian tendencies within the Panth. The manuscript evidence has brought to light another recension that was prepared in 1610 when Jahangir imprisoned Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. It is popularly known as Lahori *bir* or "recension" because it was found at a shrine in Lahore. The Lahore recension differs from the Kartarpur version only in its concluding section. It has a different order, sometimes ending with the saloks ("couplets" or "stanzas") of Kabir and Farid and sometimes with the panegyrics by the Sikh bards in praise of the Gurus. In 1642, a Sikh named Banno traditionally prepared another recension of the *Adi Granth* at *Khara Mangat* in *Gujrat* district. The Banno *bir* consists of the Kartarpur text plus some unauthorized additions. It originated at a time when the main center of Sikh activities shifted from Amritsar to Kiratpur under Guru Hargobind who had to withdraw to the Shivalik Hills due to the pressure of Mughal authorities. The central

place of Amritsar fell into the hands of *Minas* (“scoundrels”), the followers of Prithi Chand and his descendants. In many instances, the later scribes and their groups within the *Panth* failed to understand the editorial insights of Guru Arjan and struggled with problematic texts. Some of them made some intentional changes in the text to reflect the changed historical situation of the *Panth*.

In order to prevent the circulation of three different versions of the *Adi Granth*, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, closed the canon by adding the works of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the original compilation during the last decades of the seventeenth century at a place called *Damdama Sahib* in Anandpur. This event marked a significant completion of a matrix of revelation for the Sikh community. It was asserted that core truths of the tradition had been established irrevocably, and the documents included in the canon were a witness to these truths in an authoritative way. This process reflected the top-down mode of canonization in the history of scriptural traditions. This final text is popularly known as the *Damdama bir*, a version that provides the text of the modern *Guru Granth Sahib*. There still exist a number of manuscripts of this standard *Damdama* version around Anandpur and Bathinda area, the main centers of Sikh activities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The closing of canon, however, did not mean that other versions of the *Adi Granth* went out of circulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a matter of fact, the Banno recension was predominant. The revival of the standard text based upon the *Damdama* version took place during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) who was able to procure the Kartarpur volume for this purpose. He patronized the scribes who made beautiful illuminated copies of this new version, which were sent as gifts to all the Sikh *Takhts* (“thrones”) and other major *gurdwaras*. Notably, the *Maharaja* presented a beautiful copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, with two colored illustrations and finely decorated margins with art work to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, which is now in the possession of Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi of Una Sahib ([5], pp. 228–229). The first printed edition

of the standard *Damdama* version appeared in 1864 that gave a fillip to its universal acceptance. The Singh Sabha reformers sanctified this standard version and set aside all other versions used in earlier centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Adi Granth* text even attained a standard pagination of 1,430 pages in total as a result of printing uniformity during the colonial period ([5], pp. 232–233).

### The Content and Structure of the *Adi Granth*

It is instructive to note that Guru Arjan’s prodigious efforts were responsible for the creation of Sikh scripture. He used the best possible words to crystallize the divine message. Indeed, his intention was to create a “letter-perfect text” for the Sikh community. He carefully directed the whole operation of recording of the *Adi Granth*. This is quite evident from his personal approval of the content, form, and organization of the *bani* (“divine word”) in particular *raga* sections, as indicated by the use of the word *sudh* (“correct”) in the margins of the text. In fact, the use of such editorial directions as *sudh* and *sudh kichai* (“make corrections”) in the Kartarpur *bir* and other early documents (such as the Bhai Rupa pothi) makes sense only when we place them in the context of what are normally described as the “inspection notes” (*arz-didas*) recorded in the fly-leaves of imperial manuscripts prepared during Emperor Akbar’s reign ([7], pp. 160–161). In Mughal India, it was a well-established tradition of sending the books written by calligraphers and scribes for proofing by the comparing scribe, whose duty was to compare a copy with the original and correct any mistake. Such a specialist was called the corrector (*musahhih*) who was a man of great ability and learning ([10], p. 14). Similarly, a professional class of calligraphers and scribes maintained the manuscripts of *gurbani* at the Sikh court in the Guru’s archives (*pothi mahal*). Historically, the pothis of *gurbani* have always remained prized and frequently used ritual objects, and Sikh scribes have continually worked as carefully as possible to copy them, always holding dear the belief that they were producing as accurate and correct (*sudh*) text as they could.

Guru Arjan's achievement can be seen from the remarkably consistent structure of the *Adi Granth*. He devised certain checks and balances which made it extremely difficult for anyone to interpolate extraneous matter in the text without being identified. Each entry in the *Adi Granth* is numbered, and its position is further determined by its raga, authorship, and metrical form. On the whole, the *Adi Granth* consists of 5,871 hymns of carefully recorded authorship. The code word *mahala* (or simply M) with an appropriate number identifies the composition of each Guru. The works by Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, and Guru Tegh Bahadur are indicated by M1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9, respectively. All the Gurus sign their compositions "Nanak" in the *Adi Granth* to stress the unity and continuity with the founder of the tradition. The fundamental message of all the Gurus remains the same that liberation can be achieved only through meditation on the divine name. Most importantly, the *Adi Granth* stresses uncompromising monotheism in which there is no place for incarnation or idol worship.

The systematic arrangement of the *Adi Granth* reveals that Guru Arjan followed a well-defined pattern of organization that was seldom breached. The text of the *Adi Granth* is divided into three major sections. The introductory section includes three liturgical prayers: (1) Guru Nanak's *Jappi* ("meditation") is recited early in the morning; (2) five hymns of the *Sodar* ("that door") text and four hymns of the *So Purakh* ("that being") composition form part of the evening prayer; and (3) five hymns of *Sohila* ("praise") text are recited at bedtime.

The middle section contains the bulk of the material that is divided into 31 major *ragas* ("melodic patterns") in the standard version of the *Adi Granth*. Each *raga* has further subdivisions based on the length of the compositions, beginning with the shorter *pad* genre (usually *chaupadas* or "four verses"), followed by other poetic forms (*astapadis* or "octaves," *chhant* or "lyrical hymn," and other longer works such as Guru Nanak's *Siddh Gost*, Guru Amar Das's *Anand*, and Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*), and ending with the longer *var* or "ballad." The hymns in each

of these classifications are arranged in such a way that the works of Guru Nanak are placed first and are followed by those of the later Gurus in the order of their succession. Similarly, the works of the Bhagats (*bhagat bani*) are arranged at the end of each raga section ([6], pp. 1–41).

The final section includes an epilogue comprising of miscellaneous works that could not be accommodated in the middle section. It concludes with Guru Arjan's *Mundavani* and his final *salok* of gratitude, followed by a controversial text *Ragamala* ("garland of ragas").

### Interpretations of the *Adi Granth*

Interestingly, the more canonical a text, the greater amount of attention it receives in its interpretation. It is no wonder that the *Adi Granth* text has an inexhaustible hermeneutic potential. No matter how much one studies and interprets it, the deeper aspects of its meaning remain yet to be fathomed. Each generation of scholars has tried to unfold its meaning from its particular angle. Anyone schooled in the history of *Adi Granth* interpretation can easily identify the intellectual context in which almost any extensive sample of interpretation was produced. In fact, scriptural interpretation has styles that reflect clearly and distinctly the cultures and contexts of individual interpreters, the schools they represent, and the creative worlds in which they worked, including their cutting-edge ideas, interpretive skills, fads, and even erroneous beliefs. There are no predetermined meanings but only actual meanings determined by larger social and political contexts. The least one can say is to assert that narratives are "meanings in motion." Indeed, the dynamic nature and plurality of interpretations have remained part and parcel of Sikh tradition throughout its history ([5], pp. 239–261). The *Adi Granth* will have future meanings too, meanings which have yet to be determined.

Verne Dusenbery has categorized two different hermeneutic approaches to understand the inspired words of the *Adi Granth*. One approach places emphasis on the "meaning" of textual words by following what is called "dualistic understanding" of language. The dualistic ideology of language "privileges reference, semantic



meaning, the arbitrariness of signifier and signified, and the context-free cognitive qualities of the text at the expense of the sound properties of the words themselves" ([1], p. 389). The Singh Sabha scholars adopted this approach to scriptural interpretation that was primarily guided by the rationalistic influence of Western education. It is normally understood to reflect the "modernist perspective" based on the scientific paradigm of the Enlightenment. The second hermeneutic approach is generally known as "non-dualistic understanding" of language. It is a "context-sensitive" approach and is linked to the practical efforts of "reading, listening, and singing" the hymns of the scripture. Because of its association with performative practices, it is called "hermeneutics of praxis." It recognizes "the material as well as cognitive properties of language (especially articulated speech) and refuses to privilege semantico-referential meaning at the expense of other properties that language is thought to possess" ([1], pp. 388–389).

Indeed, the sonic form itself is regarded as sacred and listening to sacred sound as transcendental. The non-dualistic ideology, therefore, places great emphasis on the sacredness of the "sound" of the scriptural words. According to this approach, the sacred sounds of *gurbani* have transformative power only if they are replicated exactly as they were first enunciated by the Sikh Gurus. That is why the hymns of the *Adi Granth* are sung in particular ragas ("melodic patterns") in the central devotional practice of *kirtan* ("devotional singing") in Sikhism. In devotional singing, the Guru's hymns gain their full evocative power in the aesthetic experience of both performers and listeners. The oral experience of scripture has received much attention in recent scholarship. Both scholars and common people are now involved in a process in which they make an attempt to recapture the spirit of "personalism" that has been lost in the transition away from oral/aural language. Not surprisingly, the dualistic hermeneutic approach has come under fire in a postmodern critique of context-free objective scholarship. For instance, A. K. Ramanujan's critique of Western hermeneutics is the case in point

([3], pp. 34–51). For a long time, he argues, Western scholarly approaches to South Asian cultural and religious traditions had a tendency to omit the complex structure of performative practices. These approaches were mainly preoccupied with a "context-free" hermeneutic analysis that would not lend itself to "context-sensitive" forms of cultural practice and narrative tradition. However, Dusenbery has demonstrated that the Sikh experience implicitly challenges analytic dichotomies that rigidly oppose oral and written texts, or sound and meaning, or that which foresees an inevitable evolutionary movement between them ([1], p. 387).

Scholars and lay people have successfully applied both dualistic and non-dualistic hermeneutic approaches in actual practice in understanding the message of the *Adi Granth*. Even the Gurus themselves placed greater emphasis on the understanding of the meaning of *gurbani* rather than the mindless "ritualization" of religious practice. Therefore, both informative and performative practices occupy the central place in Sikh hermeneutics. Each act of hermeneutic encounter with the *Adi Granth* text is unique, because it is the encounter with the eternal Guru as disclosed in it. Thus, it is the text that illumines the interpreter like radiance, not the interpreter who illumines the text. In order to appreciate this phenomenon, we need to look into Paul Ricoeur's magical looking-glass theory of textual meaning. He asserts that the meaning of the text does not lie behind it, in the region of intention and ostensive reference, but in front of it in the space of interpretation ([4], p. 141). For the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib is new every morning. As a living force in their lives, it has functioned as an ever-fresh source of timeless truth. While reading it or listening to its contents, the Sikhs have heard the voice of *Akal Purakh* ("the timeless being"), the eternal Guru, speaking directly to them there and then. It is no wonder that ritual purity is observed in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. One is actually in the presence of the eternal Guru when one is engaging with the text of the *Guru Granth Sahib*: to see, to touch, and to hear it.

## Scriptural Authority

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is the basis of the most important Sikh doctrines, rituals, and social and ethical positions. Simply to be in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, or to hear a sentence read aloud from it, makes Sikhs feel that they are on sacred ground. Indeed, the place and function of the *Adi Granth* as Guru has inspired Sikhs throughout their history in personal piety, liturgy, ceremonies, and communal solidarity. It has provided a framework for the shaping of the *Panth* and has been a decisive factor in shaping a distinctive Sikh identity. It even enjoys the textual hegemony over the secondary Sikh scripture, the *Dasam Granth*, which contains the works attributed to the tenth (*dasam*) Guru, Gobind Singh. Thus, the ultimate authority within the Sikh tradition, for a wide range of personal and public conduct, lies in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In a certain sense, the Sikhs have taken their conception of sacred scripture farther than other “text-centered communities” such as Jews and Muslims.

## Cross-References

- [Anand Sahib](#)
- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurbani Kirtan](#)
- [Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai](#)
- [Poetry of the Sikh Gurus](#)

- [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [The Adi Granth](#)

## References

1. Dusenbery VA (1992) The word as guru: Sikh scripture and the translation controversy. *Hist Relig* 31(4):385–402
2. Mann GS (2001) The making of Sikh scripture. Oxford University Press, New York
3. Ramanujan AK (1999) Is there an Indian way of thinking? In: Dharwadker V (ed) The collected essays of A. K. Ramanujan. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. Ricoeur P (1981) The hermeneutical function of distanciation. In: Thomson JB (ed and trans) *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: essays on language, action, and interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
5. Singh P (2000) The *Guru Granth Sahib*: canon, meaning and authority. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
6. Singh P (2003) The Bhagats of the *Guru Granth Sahib*: Sikh self-definition and the Bhagat Bani. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
7. Singh P (2006) Life and work of *Guru Arjan*: history, memory and biography in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
8. Singh P (2008) Scripture as guru in the Sikh tradition. *Relig Compass* 2(4):659–673
9. Singh P (2008) Recent research and debates in *Adi Granth* studies. *Relig Compass* 2(6):1004–1020
10. Wade BC (1998) *Imaging sound: an ethnomusicological study of music, art, and culture in Mughal India*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

## Gutka

- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)

# H

---

## Har Krishan, Guru

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Synonyms

Guru

### Definition

Guru Har Krishan is the eighth Sikh Guru in an uninterrupted line of succession from Guru Nanak.

### Guru Har Krishan

The seventh Sikh Guru, Har Rai, died in 1661 at the age of 31. The divisiveness within the early Sikh community instigated in part by repeated interference from political factions such as lesser *Rajas* and Chiefs as well as the Mughal authorities based out of Delhi led to rifts not just within the Sikh *sangat* but internally with the *Bedi* and *Sodhi* families, the two familial lines from which Sikh authority emanated. However, there were rival claimants to the traditionally accepted Gurus from the moment Guru Nanak made Angad the second Sikh Guru. These rival claimants would

act to divide Sikhs in order to gain a financial base by building upon lay notions of piety. Factionalism associated with misguided interpretations of the Guru's hymns, therefore, has been an important component and driver of Sikh history. It was for reasons related to such issues that Guru Har Rai would disinherit his elder son Ram Rai, who upon going to Delhi to meet Mughal Emperor is said to have distorted the true teachings of the Sikh Gurus. [2, 3] This disinheritance led Guru Har Rai to instead nominate his son Har Krishan as the eighth Guru. Har Krishan was born on 7 July 1656 at Kiratpur and was only 5 years old when he was installed Guru.

Somewhat piqued at the investiture of Har Krishan and the disinheritance of Ram Rai, Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Krishan to his court a few years later, apparently with the intention of reengineering the Guruship in favor of Ram Rai. Guru Har Krishan was 9 years of age when he arrived in Delhi but before Aurangzeb could meet him he contracted smallpox and died in 1664. Guru Har Krishan was an excellent hermeneute of the *Guru Granth*, while in Delhi he is said to have told his Sikhs that the Granth was a way to see the true guru and the route to liberation. In doing so, he repeated a consistent aspect of the Sikh tradition which had been developing since Guru Arjan installed the *Adi Guru Granth* in the *Harmandar* in 1604 and which Guru Gobind Singh would consecrate by vesting final guruship to the Granth. [1–4] On his death bed, in response to the question of his successor,

Guru Har Krishan is said to have uttered the words “*Baba Bakale*,” apparently indicating that the next Guru would be found at the village of *Bakala* and that succession should not pass either to Ram Rai, Dhir Mal, or the *minas*, all of whom were now loudly pressing their claims. This utterance would eventually lead to the installation of Tegh Bahadur as the ninth Sikh guru. [2, 5]

## Cross-References

- [Amritsar](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Guru](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)

## References

1. Grewal JS (1999) *Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
2. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
3. Nabha KS (1999) *Gurushabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
4. Singh K (1963) *A history of the Sikhs*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
5. Singh H (1998) *Guru Har Krishan*. In: *The encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Har Rai, Guru

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Guru](#)

## Definition

Guru Har Rai, (1630–1661) is the seventh in an uninterrupted line of Sikh Gurus.

## Guru Har Rai

Toward the end of the life of the Sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind, it seems that the question of succession was becoming a more problematic affair. Guru Hargobind’s oldest son, Gurditta, initially favored for succession, had predeceased him as did two other sons, Ani Rai and Atal Rai. Of the remaining two Suraj Mal was considered overly materialistic, whereas Tegh Bahadur had the required attributes but was not yet ready to take up such office. Thus the Guru nominated Gurditta’s second son Har Rai to succeed him as Guru before he died in 1644 at Kiratpur. [2, 4]

Born on 16 January 1630 at Kiratpur, where the sixth Guru had resettled after departing from Amritsar due to continuing conflicts with the Mughal administrators, Guru Har Rai was the favorite grandchild of Guru Hargobind and succeeded his grandfather at the age of 14. He lived a relatively short life until the age of 31. For the first 16 years of his reign as Guru he resided in the Shivalik Hills well away from the Sikh heartland towns of Amritsar, Kartarpur, and Khadur, where the influence of the schismatic sects was kept in check only by masands still faithful to Guru Hargobind. During these years, the Guru focused upon extending the system of *bakhshishes*, or the practices of sending respected and learned Sikhs to places across the subcontinent in order to engage in discourse with other learned spiritual masters as well as spread knowledge of the Sikh Gurus’ teachings. [4] He is remembered for establishing or developing the *bakhshishes* in Dhaka, Rajasthan, Kabul, and Multan. While in Kiratpur, Guru Har Rai maintained the daily routine established by previous gurus. While he did not write any hymns of his own, he explicated upon the *shabads* of the Gurus daily and was particularly fond of quoting the vaars of Bhai Gurdas in his discourses. [2]

Although Guru Har Rai continued to maintain the troops that the sixth Guru had raised, he generally sought to avoid open conflict with the Mughals. For the most part his tenure as Guru was a relatively peaceful one. But things changed once again when the war of succession broke out between Shah Jahan’s two sons, Dara Shikoh and

Aurangzeb. The different personalities and bitter struggle between these two men followed a similar pattern to their predecessors. Dara Shikoh, the older son and heir apparent, was influenced by the *Qadariya* school of Sufism, which emphasized mystical experience. Like Akbar and Khusrau before him, Dara Shikoh sought common ground between Hindus and Muslims. According to Sikh records, Guru Har Rai developed friendly ties with Dara Shikoh after treating him for an illness. Aurangzeb, by contrast, was a strict Sunni and was supported by conservative Muslim clerics at the imperial court. One of his theological mentors was Masud, the son of Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi, who turned out to be even more fanatical than his father. Dara Shikoh was eventually defeated by Aurangzeb in two grueling battles and fled northward toward Lahore, where he was eventually caught and executed on grounds of apostasy. [1–3]

Upon succession to the throne Aurangzeb adopted an intolerant and aggressive social and political policy toward non-Muslims which continued for the greater part of his reign. This policy was also reflected in his attitude toward the Sikh Gurus. Although the manner of support given by Har Rai to Dara Shikoh is not clear, it provided sufficient pretext for Aurangzeb to summon Har Rai in 1660 to court in order to give account for his alleged ties to Dara Shikoh. Sensing the Emperor's intentions, Har Rai sent his eldest son Ram Rai as his representative. However, Ram Rai proved too weak a personality to stand up to Aurangzeb and is said to have misquoted lines from the *Guru Granth Sahib* in order to please the Emperor. Aurangzeb decided to keep Ram Rai in Delhi on the assumption that he was the heir apparent of Guru Har Rai and could be manipulated into bringing the Sikhs under his control. With this in mind the Emperor continued to provide patronage to Ram Rai, granting him revenue-free lands in the Himalayan district of Dehra Dun. When news of the manner of Ram Rai's capitulation reached Guru Har Rai, the latter disinherited Ram Rai, instead nominating his son Har Krishan as the eighth Guru. Guru Har Rai died in 1661 at the age of 31. The new Guru Har Krishan was only 5 years old when he was installed Guru. [1, 2]

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Guru](#)
- ▶ [Har Krishan, Guru](#)
- ▶ [Udasi\(s\)](#)

## References

1. Grewal JS (1999) *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
2. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
3. Singh K (1963) *A history of the Sikhs*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
4. Singh H (1998) Guru Har Rai. In: *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala

## Hargobind (Guru)

Rahuldeep Singh Gill  
California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks,  
CA, USA

## Definition

The sixth Guru of the Sikh tradition.

## Main Text

### The Mighty Guru

Guru Hargobind (d. 1644) was the sixth Guru (community founder) of the Sikhs, son of the fifth, and grandson of the fourth. A contemporary writer remembers him as the “mighty Guru” (*guru bhari*) and the “army-crushing warrior Guru” (*dal bhanjan guru surma*) for his embracing of the manners of a bellicose prince. He was father of the ninth Guru and grandfather of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and final Guru who was also renowned for his martial prowess.

As the only son of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, Hargobind was his obvious successor. In his compositions Guru Arjan discusses his son's birth and early life, writes of his gratitude to God for blessing him with a son, and sees the boy's birth as a sign in



the development of the community that Guru Nanak founded. It seems that Guru Hargobind contracted a dangerous disease resulting in fever early in life, probably small pox, and his father sees his recovery as a result of divine intervention.

Guru Hargobind was born into a context of state interference in the affairs of the community as well as sibling rivalry over the office of Guru. At his father's death in 1606, the young Guru Hargobind prevailed over sectarianism in Sikh tradition, as well as the external difficulties posted by his father's assassination in Mughal hands. The execution took place in the Mughal garrison city of Lahore, a few miles from the Sikh center in town of Amritsar. The memoirs of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir indicate that Guru Arjan's family and possessions were seized by the administration. Sikh tradition says Guru Hargobind wore two swords to his succession ceremony and eventually patronized a platform "where he could formally conduct his temporal duties" in the same complex as the central Sikh house of worship, or *Darbar Sahib*. This platform of temporal power later developed into the building known as the *Akal Takhat* ("eternal throne"), cementing the Sikh ideal of the Guru's dominion over spiritual and political matters. [2]

Guru Hargobind further defied the state's authority by erecting a fort for Amritsar's defense, called *Lohgarh* (the "iron fort"). In epistles to followers he encouraged Sikhs to bring weapons and horses in tithe. [2] Within a few years after his father's assassination, Guru Hargobind was held as a political prisoner in a Mughal fort in the town of Gwalior (central India) for debts unpaid relating to his father's death and probably also to intimidate the young prince.

In the late 1620s, he moved to a town called *Kartarpur*, east of Amritsar, and from the early 1630s until his death in 1644, he resided even further east in the Himalayan foothills. The two towns he abandoned due to Mughal interference (Amritsar and Kartarpur) were each taken over by sectarian rivals until they were brought back into the mainstream again in the 1690s. Kiratpur, Guru Hargobind's abode in the foothills, paved the way for the later important Sikh towns of Chak Nanaki and Anandpur. Anandpur eventually became the

Sikh center until Amritsar was brought back into the fold and remains to this day one of the most sacred places in the Sikh geography.

At Kiratpur, Guru Hargobind established his court as an aristocratic lord in circumstances similar to those sub-imperial Rajput rulers who had survived in the hills. A network of supporters continued to send offerings from the plains. The retreat to the hills seemed to end further Mughal persecution of the Guru and his followers. [4] Relatively unbothered at Kiratpur, he was able to build a network of loyalists around the Shivalik hills that may have been influential for the period of Sikh rule ("*Khalsa Raj*") from Anandpur under the reign of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

The idea of being the fifth successor of Guru Nanak seemed to have been clearly at the forefront of Guru Hargobind's mind, as he signed his epistles with the title "Nanak." He was engaged in major changes that took place to the office of the Guru, by way of trends initiated by his father and grandfather who had established Amritsar as the Sikh center and had kept the office of the Guru in their family lineage (the Sodhi clan). His father, Guru Arjan, reports having great mansions and an army and Guru Hargobind continues that trend of politicization of the community. He was known for his fondness for hunting, which caused him to be viewed as less involved in the affairs of the spiritual lives of the congregants and more so in the political and martial realities of his day.

Guru Hargobind seems to have been very sensitive to the women in his family. He had a manuscript of Sikh liturgical compositions compiled for Bibi Viro, his only daughter, and another manuscript was given to his granddaughter, Bibi Rupo, as a wedding present. Chak Nanaki was named after Guru Hargobind's wife by his son Guru Tegh Bahadur. [2]

The Guru, through charisma and might, seems to have balanced uneasy tensions between his imperial and sectarian rivals. The Dabistan says he was in the service of Mughal emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan. He is supposed to have paid a visit of mourning to his rival and cousin Miharban after the death of his uncle Prithi Chand in 1618.

Contemporary testimony depicts a young prince who rises to religious leadership when his

father is killed and whose sheer charisma and martial strength effect great success in the face of great danger. Guru Hargobind is able to maintain ties with his Sikhs from near and far who are extremely loyal to him. He parries the authority of his sectarian rivals while still performing filial duties. He keeps the Mughals at bay with a combination of military might and political deft. The Dabistan reports that Guru Hargobind's retinue in the Shivalik hills included 700 horses, 300 horsemen, and 60 gunmen. The contemporary sources are quite enamored by his personality and range of abilities.

Sikhs continue to keep Guru Hargobind's personality alive in legends and Sikh sacred memory. They celebrate his release from Gwalior prison as a moment of "emancipation" (*bandi chorh*), providing the justification for Sikh celebration of the Indian fall harvest festival known as *Diwali*. According to the legend, the charming Guru Hargobind so enamored his captors that he was allowed to take as many of his coprisoners along with him as could hold onto his shirt. In the legend, Guru Hargobind had a grand flowing robe made so that all the captives of the jail could grab hold of him and find "liberation," a sure metaphor for soteriological emancipation.

The Sikh poet Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of the Guru, reports that curious Sikhs ask Guru Hargobind in humble supplication about the future succession of his office. Guru Hargobind answers that during the dark times of the day, his clan, the *Sodhis*, will continue their rule on the unshakeable foundation set forth by Guru Nanak in order to reform the world. The implication of this statement is that the existing religions and political establishments of the world had lost their legitimacy in a chaotic world, and the Sikhs would take up the mantle under the Guru's leadership.

The Dabistan corroborates that Sikhs approached their Guru with hands folded in supplication (*ardas*) and that "the Guru too similarly consults the *sangat* or the assembly of Sikhs about his own wishes." That seventeenth-century text also relays a story of the Guru in battle correcting an opponent on his use of a sword and then slaying the enemy in the final lesson. When Guru Hargobind and his coterie moved to the hills of the Punjab where the

goddess was worshipped, his Sikhs teach the goddess-worshipping Rajputs a lesson through irony and humor. He befriended a Robin Hood-type figure named Bidhi and made him a leader in the community.

Bhai Gurdas also writes about his relations with unseemly figures. But for Gurdas, Guru Hargobind is unquestionably the true Guru, and as such he is the true emperor. The congregation is his true court, and spiritually, this means those devoted to him have already achieved liberation. As emperor, Guru Hargobind is bearing an unbearable burden. He is a king and a holy man, emperor, and mystic who dishes out the sweet experience of spiritual achievement in the metaphorical "cup of love." At his court he employs fellow "drunks" (Sikhs) as well as the "sober" (those who have not drunk from his cup, or non-Sikhs). Immersed in the experience, his disciples love their true emperor.

Gurditta was the Guru's beloved son and his heir apparent. Known in contemporaneous sources as "*Baba ji*," Gurditta predeceased his father, and his own son Har Rai succeeded Guru Hargobind. In turn, Guru Har Rai appointed his son Guru in 1661, until the office passed back to Teg Bahadur, another of Guru Hargobind's sons in 1664. Guru Hargobind passed away in Kiratpur in 1644, and the Dabistan reports that many servants tried to jump into the funeral pyre in grief.

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai](#)
- [Har Rai, Guru](#)
- [Persian Sources \(and Literature\) on Sikhs](#)
- [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)
- [Violence \(and Nonviolence\), Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Dhir KS (1995) *Guru Hargobind Sahib Jivan te Pratibha*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala
2. Mann G (2004) *Sikhism*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey

3. Grewal JS (1990) *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, New York
4. Richards JF *The Mughal Empire*. Cambridge University Press, New York
5. Singh S (2007) *Guru Bhari: Jivani Guru Hargobind Ji*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala

---

## Hermeneutics (Sikhism)

Harjeet Singh Grewal

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Synonyms

[Gutka](#); [Parchar](#); [Prachar](#); [Teeka](#); [Viakhia](#)

### Definition

Hermeneutics as it pertains to Sikhism is largely defined as *viakhiakari*. This is taken to mean the craft of elaborating, interpreting, and elucidating spiritual texts such as those sabads found in *Guru Granth Sahib*. More specifically, there are two branches of Sikh hermeneutics; the first deals with the elucidation of the specific details of religious, or *dharmic*, texts which includes but is not limited to the *Guru Granth Sahib*; the second mode of elaboration is limited to more literary, or poetical texts in order to provide a context or situated analysis of some of the more ambiguous features of such texts. Traditionally, the style of exposition was oral, but in more recent times, it has become textual while simultaneously maintaining certain aspects of expression found in oral form of exposition. Hermeneutics was performed by expositors that had linked themselves to various hermeneutical styles that developed over Sikh history. The venues of performance include *Gurdwaras*, *Dharamshalas*, or *Akharas*, and the focal point was always the *sangat* which gathered to hear the singing of sabad from the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the subsequent expositions of its hermeneutes. The main modes of exposition include (1) *padarth*, which

explains the difference in meanings of words; (2) *teeka*, which was a style of commentary that was practiced using very easily understood language. This form has largely been textualized today; (3) *bhash*, focusing upon broader themes and sentiments evoked by the expository text as well as theorizing about textual intricacies and contextualizations; and (4) *paramarth*, this mode was most intimately related to elaborating and explaining theological, cosmological, or spiritual questions that arose out of the expository text as such it would sometimes employ philosophical or theological theories such as *Advaita Vedanta*.

### Main text

#### Formation and Evolution of Sikh Hermeneutic Tradition

Arguably, the tradition of hermeneutics begins with the Sikh Gurus, and, more specifically, a hermeneutic vision is present from the beginning within Guru Nanak's own writing. The body of texts known as *Janamsakhis* describe the establishment of a community of Sikhs at Kartarpur by Guru Nanak. It was here that the community undertook to routinize its practice by gathering as a *sangat* to hear and sing the *shabads* of Guru Nanak. It is believed that this was commonly followed by expositions of the sabad that had been performed. The narratives of Guru Nanak's meetings and discussions with ascetic mendicants from many parts of South Asia also attest to the hermeneutic interest that Guru Nanak espoused. This tradition of exposition continued as the gurus passed on to the subsequent gurus and ended with Guru Gobind Singh's enshrining of the *Adi Granth* as the guru. As such, it has been argued that the *bani* and *shabad* found in the *Guru Granth Sahib* are the vestiges of the hermeneutics of the Sikh gurus as well as other ascetics and bhagats. This tradition of exposition begins with a radical spiritual event which is followed by the outpouring of versified thoughts related to that event. This kind of hermeneutics has been called *sehaj pranali*, the slow process of elaboration that occurs in degrees.

Apart from the *sehaj pranali*, another form of exposition that was more reliant upon *sabad* and *bani* crystallized. Each of these early traditions drew legitimacy from its connection with one or many of the Sikh Gurus. One of the earliest known traditions begins with Guru Nanak's son Srichand. He established the *Udasi pranali* which was steeped in a deep ascetic practice which appears to have resembled a form of Saivite asceticism. These were mainly oral exegetes of wondering renunciates who travelled widely. While engaging in ascetic practices such as *yoga*, they were vehemently committed to the *bani* of the Sikh Gurus and would engage in elaborating the verses of the Sikh gurus to the *sangats* that visited their centers.

A more ephemeral tradition began with Guru Amardas; this group of exegetes came to be known as the 22 *manjidars*. While they are thought to have engaged in hermeneutic analysis of *gurbani*, their role seems largely relegated to an administrative one. The image that comes down to us of these exponents is that of wise men who sat upon charpoys and gave expositions of *gurbani* to *sangats* that gathered at the feet of the charpoy. Unlike the *Udasi pranali*, these *manjidars* inculcated a householder lifestyle and were connected to the places of their residence likely through kinship ties.

Thus, it is with the latter gurus one begins to see the formation of more formalized forms of hermeneutics and exegesis. Guru Ramdas and Guru Arjun's time as guru witnessed the development of the *bhai pranali*, the *parmarth pranali*, and the *masands*. The *bhai pranali* is associated with some of the most lasting and influential exegetes from the early Sikh community whose hermeneutical expositions have been retained to some degree in written form. These exegetes are Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Buddha, and Bhai Mani Singh. They are thought to have incorporated an analytical style that employed all four modes of hermeneutical analysis all the while doing so in a plain and easy to understand register of language. Their writings have come down to us mainly in poetic verse. The *parmarth pranali* is associated with Sodhi household, which was the family from whence all the latter gurus arose. One of the

most well-known texts from this tradition is Sodhi Meharban's, *Janamsakhi*. This text has a more expository style which more singularly dwells upon theological and cosmological questions than other known *janamsakhis*. Furthermore, the focus of elaboration was connected intimately to Guru Nanak's writings and a form of narrating a hermeneutic of these writings through incidents in the Guru's life. The *masands* may have developed out of the 22 *manjidars* as they were largely associated with collection of revenue and transferring it for use by the Gurus. It is thought that they were involved in a form of oral exegesis, but their role in the community was annulled by Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh helped to establish the last of the hermeneutic traditions that developed during the Guru Period. These two traditions are the *nirmala pranali* and the *sampradaya pranali*. There were originally five *Nirmalas* who were selected by Guru Gobind around 1686 to travel as *brahmacarya* students to Kashi to engage in learning Sanskrit and Brahmanic philosophy. They return after the *Khalsa* had been established and quickly took initiation so as to express their affiliation with Guru Gobind Singh. The *Nirmalas* spent a large amount of time outside of Panjab, mainly at the popular religious centers of South Asian such as Haridwara, Allahabad, and Kashi. Their form of exegesis increasingly incorporated aspects of *Brahmanic* philosophical thought and, at a more popular level, aspects of the broader South Asian tradition of folklore in order to explain aspects of *gurbani*. The *Sampradaya pranali* or *giani taksaal* was largely established within Panjab and retained its connection to the *Khalsa*. One of the early exponents was directly from the earlier mentioned *Bhai pranali*; through Bhai Mani Singh the *giani pranali* was able to claim a link to the earlier form of hermeneutics.

While most of these *pranali* traditions have transposed into modernity, the colonial and modern period also witnessed the further evolution of the hermeneutic tradition largely through the Singh Sabha socioreligious reform movement and also through turn toward inculcating a variety of hermeneutics within a new institutional formation: the university. The Singh Sabha is thought

to have redefined the hermeneutic tradition through formulating a binary between *Sanatan* and *Tat Khalsa* versions of the Sikh tradition. This distinction can be largely mapped onto what would come to be institutionalized as a different binary between orthodox and heterodox versions of the tradition. In doing so, these new traditions liquidated much of the nuance and varieties of hermeneutics that were extant up to that moment. They did so by establishing an institutional form that was understood as having superseded the earlier forms. Much of this new version of hermeneutics is textually based and functions within the confines of reasoned conceptual thought. It also functions through the introduction of English as a linguistic register for exegesis and as such draws its analytical frame largely from the theological and philosophical debates related to creation, God, existence, good and evil, belief and faith, ethics, and transcendence. As such it could be seen as an iteration of the *paramarth* tradition.

## Cross-References

- [Colonialism](#)
- [Nirmala\(s\)](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)
- [Singh Sabha](#)
- [Udasi\(s\)](#)

## References

1. Kaur S (1997) Three basics of Sikh religious thought: faith, grace and prayer. Pragati Publications, Delhi
2. Kohli SS (1966) Outlines of Sikh thought. Punjabi Prakashak, New Delhi
3. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the West: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
4. McLeod WH (2006) Prem Sumarg: the testimony of a Sanatan Sikh. OUP
5. Oberoi H (1994) Construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Chicago University Press, Chicago
6. Sharma A (2007) The philosophy of religion: a Sikh perspective. Rupa & Co., New Delhi
7. Singh J (1977) Indian philosophical and religious thought and Guru Nanak. In: Singh T (ed) Teachings of Guru Nanak.
8. Singh J (2009) Applied philosophy in Guru Granth Sahib. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh J (2004) Spirituo-ethical philosophy of Guru Angad Dev. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
10. Singh P (1997) The interpretations of *Mul Mantra*. In: Singh I, Kaur M (eds) Guru Nanak: a global vision. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
11. Singh T (1998) Gurbani dian Viakhian Pranalian. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
12. Singh T (2000) Theological concepts of Sikhism. In: Joshi LM (ed) Sikhism. Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Historical Research on Sikhism

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Historical Sources (Sikhism)

Anne Murphy  
Department of Asian Studies, UBC Asian Centre,  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC,  
Canada

## Synonyms

[Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Definition

On major sources for the history of the Sikh tradition.

## Historical Sources for the Sikh Tradition

The history of the Sikh tradition is reflected in a range of sources. Textual sources have to date occupied the center of historical inquiry, but



material culture in various forms must also inform understanding of the Sikh past. This less commonly explored source includes objects related to the Gurus and other important persons in the tradition – which can be called “relics” – as well as historical gurdwaras, or Sikh congregational sites. Through these, a landscape of the Sikh past emerges, where places associated with historical events in the tradition become sites of commemoration and the Sikh collective experience of the past. Coins, manuscripts, and courtly art objects provide additional forms of evidence of the historical past of the Sikh tradition. Full understanding of the tradition is also enhanced by consideration of the context for the historical development of Sikh tradition, to understand and make use of a range of sources from outside the Sikh tradition that reveal much about the tradition’s development in its historical milieu.

### The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Early and Canonical Sources

The *Guru Granth Sahib* of course remains the central source for a historical understanding of the Sikh tradition, particularly through the compositions authored by the Gurus themselves. Crucial historical material is also available in the compositions of the bards who are included in the text, and in the works by the *bhagats* or saints, with whose work the Sikh Gurus were in dialogue. The canonical text not only reveals beliefs associated with the Sikh tradition, but also allows us to understand aspects of the social life and practices at the core of the tradition, and its historical development over time. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, indeed, is also the most reliable source that exists for the life of Guru Nanak, both in terms of biography and in revealing who he was as a thinker and leader. In addition to the *content* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the history of its *textual* formation also serves as an important source for understanding the ideological consolidation and institutionalization of the *panth*, as has been explored at length by Pashaura Singh and Gurinder Singh Mann. [17, 18, 29, 30]

The *janam-sākhīs*, or literally “witnessings of the life,” of Guru Nanak provide a different kind of source on the life of the first Guru. These stories of the life of Guru Nanak were written down, as far as the historical record tells us, approximately a century after the death of the first Guru and exist in various recessions. Their relative value as historical sources is open to debate. W.H. McLeod has argued that it is necessary to distinguish between the “Nanak of faith” and the “Nanak of history”: These texts provide a vision of the former, not the latter. A failure to distinguish between these two, McLeod argues, “must inevitably cloud . . . understanding of Guru Nanak himself,” because of the inclusion of miracle stories and other problematic material in the *janam-sākhīs*. ([21], p. 38) Whereas in his earlier work, McLeod attempted to discern which aspects of the *janam-sākhī* texts were historically accurate and to separate out that which was not; in his later work, he emphasized that what is historically valuable about the *janam-sākhīs* is not their relative biographical accuracy, but that instead “the testimony which the *janam-sākhīs* give is to their own period and place” (see also. [20, 21], p. 43) Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh shares this position, embracing the “mythic” aspects of the *janam-sākhīs* to argue that “the ‘truth’ of the myths is to be found in the history and the life of the religious community”. ([31], p. 343)

There are numerous sources from outside the Sikh tradition itself that contribute to an understanding of the tradition’s history. Many of these are in Persian, which was an important courtly and literary language in Punjab and environs in the period of the Gurus, from the early sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. [12] The *Dābistan-i-Mazāhib*, for example, provides a portrait of the community in the early Guru period, as observed by a traveler from outside the tradition. ([12], pp. 59–84) Mughal records do not speak at length about the Sikh tradition, and there is little corroborating evidence in the imperial record for claims to land and other rights, for example, by the Gurus. The meeting of Guru Arjan with Akbar, however, is recorded in the imperial record by Abū’l Fazl, the *Akbarnāmā* – as is the execution of Guru Arjan, at the order of Jahangir, Akbar’s

successor, both in the *Dābistan-i-Mazāhib* and in the imperial record. ([12], pp. 55–57) The number of such outside observers only increases over time.

## The Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Sources for the later Gurus include the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which includes the ninth Guru's creations alongside the compositions by the first five Gurus. The *Dasam Granth* provides a valuable resource for understanding the tenth Guru and the history of the community at that time. It has been revered in Sikh contexts since the early eighteenth century, although evidence internal as well as external to the text indicates that it was of a different order than the canonical text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which occupied primary place in ritual and ideological terms. The contents of the *Dasam Granth* also vary; Jeevan Deol has identified five major recensions. ([7], p. 32) Most of the contents of the *Dasam Granth* were said to have been written in the 1690s in Anandpur and Paonta, explaining the lack of discussion of the formation of the *Khalsa* in 1699. Authorship of the contents of the text is debated. Some sections seem clearly to have been authored by the tenth Guru: the *Jāp Sahib*, *Akāl Ustat*, *Bachittar Nātak* (which features the autobiographical section known as the “*Apnī Kathā*” or “my story”), and *Zafarnāmā*. Other sections are more controversial for their expression of Vaishnava and Shakta influence. [27] However, while direct attribution to the Guru may be impossible in some cases, most agree that the text represents the creative output overall of the Guru and his court, a gathering of devotees, supporters, and poets. ([10], p. 27) Most of the text is written in a form of *Braj*, linking it to broader literary traditions both courtly and religious across North India; indeed, the later Gurus' compositions are also in *Braj*. The Tenth Guru's famous entreaty for justice from the Mughal Emperor, the *Zafarnāmā*, is written in Persian, which was the preferred language for literary expression across North India and the Deccan in the period. [11] In this way, the

text reflects the two major currents of literary production in the period and, as Louis Fenech and Robin Rinehart's recent work demonstrates, must be read in relation to the extant literature in both *Braj* and Persian across northern India. [10, 11, 27]

Textual sources proliferate in the eighteenth century. One important body of texts are the *Rahit*, which provide crucial information about the practices and behaviors that constitute membership in the community, as well as narrative sections that link this type of text to a imultaneously emergent form of historiographical literature known as the *Gurbilās*, the “sport” or “play” of the Guru. There is a great deal of diversity to the *Rahit* literature in the early period, reflecting diverse speakers and the historical circumstances of textual creation. According to W.H. McLeod, the six earliest versions of the *Rahit* from the eighteenth century include the early *Nasīhat-nāmā*, or “manual of instruction,” which later comes to be known as the *Tanakhāh-nāmā*, and erroneously ascribed to Bhai Nanda Lal, the earliest manuscript of which is dated to 1718–1719, and the mid-eighteenth century *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*, which is far more elaborate in its scope and length. [22] These versions do not contain a single vision of the *Khalsa*, but are consistent in their concern for the definition of beliefs and practices associated with the formation of the Sikh *panth* (community) and *Khalsa* and the designation of exclusions and inclusions that define the *panth*. The *Gurbilās* genre begins with writings attributed to the Tenth Guru, particularly his *Bachittar Nātak*. Another early example of this type of literature, the *Gur Sobhā* by Sainapati, is not only a historical account of the final Guru's life and teachings but also expresses early elements of the *Rahit*, offering, as McLeod notes, “the first clear impression of what the Guru required of those who were initiated as the first members of the *Khalsa* order” ([22], p. 59; [23]): the two genres are thus intimately connected. The *bansāvalināme* and *gurpranālīān*, which are centrally concerned with attesting to the authentic lineage of the Guru and organizing the past around this lineage, also emerge in this period and provide important sources on both the Gurus and

the growing self-consciousness of the community in asserting a comprehensive vision of the community's past.

The *Gurbilās* literature is of importance not just as documentation of the life and times of the final human embodied Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, as well as previous Gurus; it also demonstrates a particular Sikh historical sensibility that draws both upon Sikh antecedents, such as the *janam-sākhī* literature, and on historical interests found in other languages and religious/cultural contexts, such as the Persian *tarīkh* or historical literature, and the hagiographical literature associated with devotional movements across North India. Centrally, the *Gurbilās* literature narrates historical events of the late Guru period, as well as the transition into the period of nonhuman Guruship as invested in the *granth* (scriptural text) and *panth* (community). It also reveals how the community was configured in diverse ways, with respect (for instance) to caste and urban/rural distinctions, as well as to key questions of belief and identity. [7, 8] With these texts, the representation of the past took center-stage in the self-imagination of the Sikh community. It is therefore in this period that a growing preoccupation with objects and sites related to the history of the community is manifest, and we see extensive attention to all kinds of connections to the Gurus and the history of the tradition. [24]

### The Nineteenth Century: New Sources from Regional Courts and the British Raj

With the end of the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, centralized imperial Mughal power began to fracture at the peripheries, and successor groups began to vie for power. [1, 19] The rise of Sikh-ruled states in Punjab in the later part of the eighteenth century, culminating in a large centralized state under Maharaja Ranjit Singh based at Lahore and strong smaller states in the eastern and southern part of Punjab (the so-called Phulkian states of Patiala, Kapurthala, and others, descended from a common ancestor Phul), reflects the Punjabi manifestation of this larger process. [8, 28] The acquisition of political

power by Sikh elites provided for another fluorescence of sources about – and by – Sikhs. By 1849, the annexation of Punjab by the East India Company (EIC) brought the region under British control, although EIC agents had been present in the Lahore Kingdom for several decades and had influenced both directly and indirectly the production of historical accounts of the Sikh tradition in both Persian and Punjabi. [9] A whole range of new sources on the tradition subsequently emerged by the end of the century under the administration of Punjab by the EIC and, after 1858, direct Crown rule.

The administrative records of the Lahore state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh provide us with rich information about the Sikh community in the context of this state – led by a Sikh ruler who engaged *Khalsa* symbolism in the imagination of his reign, but where Sikhs were always a numerical minority. Examination of the *dharmarth* grants, or grants for religious purposes, reveals broad support by the state for all religious institutions, but also considerable special attention to Sikh religious professionals and families associated with the Guru lineages. [24, 25] The support of a range of sites associated with the Sikh tradition expanded the landscape of the Sikh past in Punjab and beyond, and Sikh patrons of the arts encouraged the development of distinctive Sikh arts that drew upon *pahārī* or hill styles alongside Mughal ones. A wide range of historiographical texts also were produced in the period, such as Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Prachīn Panth Prakāsh* and Santokh Singh's *Srī Gurpratāp Sūraj Granth* from 1843. [5, 8, 24, 32] As Purnima Dhavan's recent work has demonstrated, early works on the Sikh tradition in Persian were created at the intersection of the diverse political and historiographical interests of the Lahore state and other Sikh elites, East India Company observers, and other political forces in the period. [9]

East India Company sources drew heavily upon such materials produced in Persian and Punjabi in the early part of the century, acting as patrons of historical accounts of the Sikhs in their efforts to understand the Sikh community and the rise to power of Sikh leaders, but by the end of the century, the administrative apparatus of

the EIC state produced its own forms of knowledge about the Sikh community, its history, and its beliefs. ([3], ch. 2) British definitions of religious identity and assumptions regarding its forms in South Asia fundamentally shaped their accounts of the Sikh tradition, as did imperial interests. All sources from this period must thus be read with care. British claims that Sikhism was in decline in the wake of annexation, for example, must be understood in relation to the interests of the Raj in maintaining the loyalty of Sikh troops, which became so important to the British Indian Army in the years after the 1857 Rebellion when Punjabi troops (with large numbers of Sikhs) were used to combat mutinying troops. Such a discourse allowed the colonial state to position itself as a protector or patron of Sikhism, which had clear political benefit.

European accounts of the Sikh tradition, such as Ernest Trump's infamous partial translation and analysis of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, also shaped religious discourse among Sikhs, Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair has shown, as Sikhs shaped their description of Sikh belief and experience in terms dictated by Western ideas of religion. [15, 16] Sikh sources from this period, therefore, must be read in relation to colonial knowledge of religion and evolving definitions of the religious sphere, as well as in relation to the reformist drive that shaped all religions in South Asia in the period. The late nineteenth century is characterized by the explosion of "tract" literature: cheaply produced literature for a newly emerging readership. As N.G. Barrier, who examined the range of texts available early on, notes: "the ethos of reform and revival among Sikhs was nourishing ideas and institutions subsequently important in the burst of neo-Sikh activity after 1920". ([4], p. 13) The Khalsa Tract Society, for example, was particularly active in producing texts of these kinds and was responsible for the publication of a large number of tracts related to the Singh Sabha Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Singh Sabha Movement was the site of the articulation of multiple influential visions of what it meant to be Sikh in the period. Much of what is understood as modern Sikhism

was shaped by this movement and the sources that it produced.

## Sources on Sikh Tradition Today

The proliferation of sources on the Sikh tradition that characterized the nineteenth century has been surpassed in the twentieth and beyond. The use of the printing press created a vibrant array of textual sources on the Sikh tradition from multiple perspectives in the early twentieth century. Such sources are accompanied by the development of institutions – and sites and material culture related to them – to represent Sikh history and Sikh interests. The passage of the Gurdwara Reform Act in 1925 and formation of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* to manage historical Sikh shrines in Punjab provides a key example of this institutionalization process that had a profound effect on Sikh textual production as well as the proliferation of sites related to the tradition. The dispersal of Punjabis, and many Sikhs, to North America, Britain, East Africa, and Southeast Asia brought about a new range of histories – and sources – that must be accounted for in understanding the Sikh community. As Tony Ballantyne has rightly argued, the history of the Diaspora community is crucial to understanding the history of the community overall. [3] With the further proliferation of information by and about the community through print and then electronic media, a diverse range of voices and institutions represent Sikh interests today. Each of these provides a valuable set of sources for historical investigation of the tradition and reveals how that history is represented in and makes sense to the present. The historical past has provided a crucial way for articulating Sikh interests, as has been pointed out by numerous observers of the *Khalistan* movement [2, 6, 13, 14, 26]: its importance however is not limited to that context. Such representations of the past themselves become historical sources on the Sikh tradition and allow us to see how the tradition has imagined itself in the present and over time. The futures that can be imagined lie within them as well.

## Cross-References

- [Art \(Sikh\)](#)
- [Colonialism](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#) (see also ► [The Adi Granth](#))
- [Persian Sources \(and Literature\) on Sikhs](#)
- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)
- [Relics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Singh Sabha](#)
- [Transnationalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Alam M (1986) *The crisis of empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
2. Axel BK (2001) The nation's tortured body: violence, representation, and the formation of a Sikh "Diaspora". Duke University Press, Durham
3. Ballantyne T (2006) *Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world*. Duke University Press, Durham/London
4. Barrier NG (1969) *The Punjab in nineteenth century tracts: an introduction to the pamphlet collections in the British Museum and India Office*. Research Committee on the Punjab and Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing
5. Bhangu RS (1993) *Prachīn Pañth Prakāsh* (ed: Vir Singh. 1841, reprint). Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi
6. Das V (1995) *Critical events: an anthropological perspective on contemporary India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi/New York
7. Deol J (2001) Eighteenth century Khalsa identity: discourse, praxis and narrative. In: Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (eds) *Sikh religion, culture, and ethnicity*, 25–46. Curzon, Richmond, Surrey
8. Dhavan P (2011) *When sparrows became hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699–1799*. Oxford University Press, New York
9. Dhavan P (2011) *Redemptive pasts and imperiled futures: the writing of a Sikh history*. In: Time, history and the religious imaginary in south Asia, 40–54. Routledge, London/New York
10. Fenech LE (2008) *The Darbar of the Sikh gurus: the court of god in the world of men*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
11. Fenech LE (2012) *The Sikh Zafar-nāmah of guru Gobind Singh: a discursive blade in the heart of the Mughal empire*. Oxford University Press, New York
12. Grewal JS, Habib I (2001) *Sikh history from Persian sources: translations of major texts. Tulike and the Indian History Congress*, New Delhi
13. Jeffrey R (1987) *Grappling with the past: Sikh politicians and the past*. *Pac Aff* 60:59–72
14. Juergensmeyer M (1987) The logic of religious violence. *J Strateg Stud* 10:172–193
15. Mandair A (2006) The politics of non-duality: reassessing the work of transcendence in modern Sikh theology. *J Am Acad Relig* 74(3):646–673
16. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York
17. Mann GS (1996) *The Goindval Pothis: the earliest extant source of the Sikh canon*. Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
18. Mann GS (2001) *The making of Sikh scripture*. Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York
19. Marshall P (2003) Introduction. In: Marshall P (ed) *The eighteenth century in Indian history: evolution or revolution?* 1–49. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
20. McLeod WH (1968) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion*. Clarendon, Oxford
21. McLeod WH (2000) *Exploring Sikhism: aspects of Sikh identity, culture, and thought*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
22. McLeod WH (2003) *Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rābit*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
23. Murphy A (2007) History in the Sikh past. *Hist Theory* 46, 2:345–365
24. Murphy A (2012) *The materiality of the past: history and representation in Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, New York
25. Murphy A (forthcoming) The management of religious sites in colonial and pre-colonial imaginaries: insights from the Khalsa Darbar records. In: Fuchs M, Dalmia V (eds) *Modernity, diversity and the public sphere: negotiating religious identities in 18th–20th century India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
26. Oberoi H (1993) Sikh fundamentalism: translating history into theory. In: Marty ME, Appleby S (eds) *Fundamentalisms and the state: remaking politics, economies, and militance*, 256–85. University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London
27. Rinehart R (2011) *Debating the Dasam Granth*. Oxford University Press, New York
28. Singh B (1993) *A history of the Sikh Misals*. Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala
29. Singh P (2000) *The guru Granth Sahib: canon, meaning, and authority*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi/New York
30. Singh P (2006) *Life and work of guru Arjan: history, memory, and biography in the Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
31. Singh N-GK (1992) The myth of the founder: the Janamsakhis and Sikh tradition. *Hist Relig* 31(4):329–343
32. Singh S (1961–1965) *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (ed: Vir Singh. 1843; repr.). Khalsa Samachar for Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, Amritsar



## Historiography (Sikhism)

Anne Murphy

Department of Asian Studies, UBC Asian Centre,  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC,  
Canada

### Synonyms

History (Sikhism); Persian literature; Punjabi literature

### Definition

On the writing of history of and in the Sikh tradition.

### The Historiography of and in Sikh Tradition

The historiographical traditions of the Sikh tradition reflect a complex interplay between western Asian and southern Asian intellectual legacies and literary traditions, and later the influence of European forms of historical representation. [5, 6, 15, 16] The full blossoming of the historiographical literature of the Sikh tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can only be understood in relation to a wider field of texts in the three major languages of source materials from the period: Punjabi and other modern Indo-Aryan languages such as *Braj*, utilized in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Dasam Granth*, and the *janam-sākhīs*, which describe the life and travels of the first Sikh Guru [12, 13]; Persian, the literature of history, commerce, and court – Mughal, Rajput, and Sikh – as well as the Tenth Guru's *Zafarnāmāh*. [6, 8]; and, later, English ([2], ch 2) The representation of the past has thus been a consistent preoccupation within Sikh tradition.

The concern for history changed over time, reflecting the changing concerns of the Sikh community in its self-formation and an evolving Sikh interest in the narration of the past in relation to

the intervention of the Gurus in the world. The writing of history, therefore, was multivalent, and was simultaneously a very Sikh concern from early on. [15, 16] Early forms such as the *janam-sākhī* literature may not be entirely accurate in their accounting, as McLeod demonstrated in his early work, but as he later notes, “the testimony which the *janam-sakhis* give is to their own period and place”. ([14], p. 43) They show how important the representation of the life of the Guru was to the evolving Sikh community: in the words of Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, they portray the “life of Guru Nanak in terms of the personal beliefs and proclivities of their authors”. ([20], p. 329) This is a theme that recurs throughout the development of historiography in the Sikh tradition (and is inherent to historiography in general): it is fundamentally shaped by the social and cultural context it is created within. The representation of the past is created in a present that fundamentally shapes understanding of the past.

This is particularly visible in Sikh histories produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, known by the general term the *gurbilās*, or “the play of the Guru”. [5, 15, 16] Such historical orientations drew upon a wide range of antecedents, and were influenced by a range of contemporary elements. A particular orientation toward historical representation within Sikh Punjabi language and literature is particularly framed in the eighteenth century in relation to Persian traditions. [5–9] Muzaffar Alam has shown that these traditions were already established in literary and administrative terms in the region by the eleventh century, when Lahore was known as “Little Ghazna,” clearly linking Punjab with political centers to the west. ([1], p. 133) Other referents were located solidly within the Sanskrit and vernacular linguistic universe. [5, 15, 16, 18] Indeed, many of the Gurus' writings are influenced by or were composed in *Braj*, a devotional and literary language across North India, and compositions within the *Dasam Granth* reflect a wide range of religious and cultural influences, drawing upon puranic sources, as Deol, Rinehart, and others have explored, but also Persian traditions. [4, 7, 8, 15, 16]

The literary and linguistic field was further complicated with the acquisition of political power by Sikh elites by the middle to the end of the eighteenth century, when the writing of history in both Persian and Punjabi was established within Sikh courts that emerged with the acquisition of political power by leaders of Sikh *misals* or kinship-based militias that banded together to organize resistance and consolidate local control. [5, 6, 15, 16, 19] The acquisition of sovereignty inflected the historical sensibility visible in the historical representation produced in the period (and in the collecting and memorial practices engaged by these courts). Simultaneously, these same courts were influenced by encroaching British influence. As Purnima Dhavan's recent work has demonstrated, historical representations of the Sikh community were created in Persian in the Ranjit Singh period at the intersection of the diverse political and historiographical interests of the Lahore state and other Sikh elites, East India Company observers, and other political forces, such that a complex negotiation of these perspectives yielded new forms of representation of the Sikh community with "intellectual sympathy with pre-colonial intellectual developments, as well as an awareness of the new modes of colonial record-keeping". ([6], p. 41) With this work can be seen the development of a new historical orientation that drew on the historical representations of the *gurbilās* literature, but at the same time exhibited a striking neutrality that Dhavan attributes to the unique position of *munshīs* or scribes at the intersection of different political interests, balancing these in their accounts of the past. ([6], pp. 50, 51) Historical representations in Sikh contexts were thus produced in relation to diverse literary and linguistic (as well as religious and political) influences in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Historical discourse in the colonial context in Punjab and in Sikh terms later also came to be shaped by discourses on the past found within colonial sources. As Tony Ballantyne has brilliantly shown, investigation into the history of the Sikh tradition was an important part of colonial information-gathering in the Lahore state before its annexation in 1849, and was an

undertaking of company officials since the 1780s. ([2], ch. 2) The desire to understand the Sikh tradition in relation to centralized Mughal authority, and later in relation to Hindu traditions, was a major preoccupation of British colonial representatives, who drew first on Persian histories, and later on Punjabi accounts. [6] Ernest Trumpp's controversial translation and explanation of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, as Arvind Mandair has shown, initiated a protracted effort on the part of Sikh intellectuals to respond and explain the Sikh tradition within the categories of understanding religion that were available to the British. ([2], p. 52ff; [10]) Max Arthur Macauliffe's 1909 work on the Sikh tradition was much more positively received by the community, but was also shaped by colonial and Eurocentric representations of Sikh tradition. ([2], p. 54ff; [17]) In this way, even as historiography of and on the Sikhs represented strong continuities with already existing traditions, British and colonial interests directly impinged on Sikh intellectual production.

The late nineteenth century was characterized by the explosion of "tract" literature: cheaply produced literature for a newly emerging readership. The Khalsa Tract Society was particularly active in producing texts of this kind and was largely responsible for the publication of tracts related to the Singh Sabha Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Within this literature, historical inquiry played a prominent role, such that "the introduction of the printing press and western interest in history helped foster the development of a historical literature in nineteenth-century Punjab". ([3], p. 7) It was a time of a literal profusion of literature on history whereby, as Tony Ballantyne has noted: "history writing became a crucial tool for community leaders who crafted epic poems, polemic pamphlets, and commentaries on 'scripture' in the hope that by clearly defining the community's past they would be able to cement their own vision of the community's present and future". ([2], p. 5) The writing of history came to be directly tied to the control of historical gurdwaras with the passage of the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, which established the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* as the body in charge of the

management of such *gurdwaras*. In this way, the landscape of Punjab itself came to represent an institutionally -organized history of the Sikh tradition. [16]

The writing of Sikh history has proved highly controversial since Independence in 1947. ([2], ch. 1) The recently deceased W.H. McLeod was heavily criticized for his “critical” approach to Sikh historiography, and identified the cause of conflict as being between “tradition” and “history”. [14] Given that the representation of the past has occupied a central place in the formation of Sikh tradition, however, such conflict has been more about different versions of history, rather than between history and something else. Indeed, as Mandair has noted, the historical in the hands of “traditionalists,” by McLeod’s accounting, is modeled on many of the same assumptions that inform the modern “historicist” approach to the Sikh past. [11] Popular Sikh historiography on the Sikh tradition has generally drawn upon Singh Sabha precedents, but academic historiography overall has also been characterized by an adherence to historicist methodologies, as is visible in the work in India of J.S. Grewal, Ganda Singh, and others. The writing of the Sikh past has thus been and continues to be a multivalent and productive site for cultural production into the present and, as always, reflects the interests of the present in the imagination of the past. As such, it promises to remain an important and also controversial endeavor.

## Cross-References

- [Historical Sources \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Persian Sources \(and Literature\) on Sikhs](#)

## References

1. Alam M (2003) The culture and politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan. In: Pollock S (ed) *Literary cultures in history: reconstructions from South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi/New York
2. Ballantyne T (2006) *Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world*. Duke University Press, Durham/London
3. Barrier NG (1969) Punjab in nineteenth century tracts: an introduction to the pamphlet collections in the British Museum and India Office. Research Committee on the Punjab and Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing
4. Deol J (2001) Eighteenth century Khalsa identity: discourse, praxis, and narrative. In: Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (eds) *Sikh religion, culture, and ethnicity*. Curzon Press, Surrey, 25–46
5. Dhavan P (2011) When sparrows became hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699–1799. Oxford University Press, New York
6. Dhavan P (2011) Redemptive pasts and imperiled futures: the writing of a Sikh history. In: *Time, history and the religious imaginary in south Asia*. Routledge, London/New York, 40–54
7. Fenech L (2008) *The Darbar of the Sikh gurus: the court of god in the world of men*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
8. Fenech L (2012) *The Sikh Zafar-nāmah of guru Gobind Singh: a discursive blade in the heart of the Mughal empire*. Oxford University Press, New York
9. Grewal JS, Habib I (2001) *Sikh history from Persian sources: translations of major texts*. Tulika, New Delhi
10. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
11. Mandair A (2011) Time and religion-making in modern Sikhism. In: *Time, history, and the religious imaginary in south Asia*. Routledge, London/New York, 186–202
12. McLeod WH (1976) *The evolution of the Sikh community*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
13. McLeod WH (1980) *Early Sikh tradition: a study of the Janam-sakhis*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
14. McLeod WH (2000) *Exploring Sikhism: aspects of Sikh identity, culture, and thought*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
15. Murphy A (2007) History in the Sikh past. *Hist Theory* 46, 2:345–365
16. Murphy A (2012) *The materiality of the past: history and representation in Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, New York
17. Murphy A (2013) Placing Max Arthur Macauliffe in context(s): Sikh historiographical traditions and colonial forms of knowledge. Unpublished paper delivered at representing Sikhism: a centennial conference in honour of the Irish scholar Max Arthur Macauliffe (11 Sept 1838–15 Mar 1913), University College Cork, Ireland, 15 Mar 2013
18. Rinehart R (2011) *Debating the Dasam Granth*. Oxford University Press, New York
19. Singh B (1993) *A history of the Sikh Misals*. Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala
20. Singh N-GK (1992) The myth of the founder: the Janamsakhis and Sikh tradition. *Hist Relig* 31:329–343

## History (Sikhism)

### ► Historiography (Sikhism)

## Hukumnama

Hardip Singh Syan  
SOAS, University of London, Russell Square,  
London, UK

## Synonyms

Legal orders; Political authority

## Definition

**Hukumnama (pl. Hukumname)** literally means “letter of order.” The term *Hukumnama* is a compound of two Persian nouns: *hukum* (order/command) and *nama* (letter/written document). The *Hukumnama* is a writ commanding Sikhs how to act or abstain from acting in some way or officially acknowledging the activities of Sikhs or summoning Sikhs to attend a hearing at a Sikh center of authority (*Takht*). For many Sikhs, the *Hukumnama* is comparable to a legal writ, though in reality the *Hukumnama* has no legal authority in any jurisdiction. But inside the Sikh community, the *Hukumnama* is regarded with religious significance, and as such, only the highest Sikh authorities have the power to serve a *Hukumnama*. The practice of issuing the *Hukumnama* started with the Sikh Gurus in the early seventeenth century, and currently, only the five *Takht* have the power to issue a *Hukumnama*.

## The History of the Hukumnama

**Premodern Hukumnama** The premodern *Hukumnama* was composed by apotheosized Sikhs and sent to Sikh congregations. [1–3] The earliest example of the *Hukumnama* is by Guru

Hargobind who sent two “letters of order” to his congregations in Patna and eastern India. ([3], pp. 61–67) All of Guru Hargobind’s successors continued the practice of issuing *Hukumnama* to Sikh congregations. In particular, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh were fond of dispatching *Hukumnama* to congregations, including congregations in Patna, Benares, Mirzapur, Dhaka, and Nawanshahr. ([3], pp. 74–191) Besides the Sikh Gurus, other prominent Sikhs also issued *Hukumnama* such as Baba Gurditta and Mata Gujri. ([3], pp. 68–69; 120–123)

In the post-Sikh Guru period (post-1708), the *Hukumnama* continued to be a popular method for Sikh leaders to communicate with Sikh congregations. Mata Sundri, Mata Sahib Devi, and Banda Singh Bahadur all dispatched *Hukumnama*. ([3], pp. 192–231) The *Hukumnama* was then employed by the Khalsa from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. ([3], pp. 232–236) Unlike earlier *Hukumnama* which solely derived their authority from the author, the Khalsa *Hukumnama* derived their authority from seats of authority (*Takht*).

The *Hukumnama* was utilized by rival Sikh Guru lineages as well. For example, in the *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* (the Discourses of Guru Miharvan), the author, Harji Sodhi, comments that Miharvan sent *Hukumnama*. ([4], p. 191)

Sikhs did occasionally request a *Hukumnama* from the Guru’s court. For example, in the *Sri Gur Sobha*, the author, Sainapati, comments that certain Sikhs from Delhi’s Sikh community requested written evidence from the Guru stipulating the making of the *Khalsa Panth* and its code of conduct. ([5], p. 93)

**Style and Content of Premodern Hukumname** All the *Hukumname* were written on paper and often produced wholly or partly by a scribe. All the *Hukumname* were marked with an official *nishan* (seal or signature) authenticating the document. The script used was unbroken *Gurmukhi*, and the language was a mixture of medieval Punjabi, *Sant Bhasa*, and *Braj*. The early *Hukumname* were not dated, but most *Hukumname* by and after Guru Gobind Singh were dated. The letters were typically short: normally consisting of one paragraph. The practice of

composing *Hukumnama* grew more sophisticated under Guru Gobind Singh as scribal groups became professionalized.

The *Hukumnama* produced by the Sikh Gurus had a similar style. All the *Hukumnama* included an introductory salutation which tended to be *Ek Omkar Guru Sati* or the slight variant *Ek Omkar Satguru*. After the creation of the Khalsa, this salutation did not alter, but on one occasion, Guru Gobind Singh chose to write *Ek Omkar Wahguru ji di Fateh heh*. ([3], p.183) By contrast, Banda Singh Bahadur started both his letters with *Ek Omkar Fateh Darshan*. ([3], pp. 192–195)

The *Hukumnama* was almost always addressed to specific Sikhs of the congregation. Those Sikhs were undoubtedly people of importance to that community. The list of Sikhs in certain *Hukumnama* was quite extensive.

The *Hukumnama* would always end on an optimistic note with the Guru assuring his Sikhs that their faith would be rewarded. For example, Guru Har Krishan assured his Patna congregation that the Guru would maintain their daily subsistence (*rojgar*) and fulfil their wishes (*manorath pure honge*). ([3], pp. 72–73)

The content of the Guru's letter was subject to individual circumstances, and certain Gurus had reoccurring phrases. For instance, Guru Hargobind once requested from his Patna congregation a pair of cuckoos and a pair of pigeons reflecting the aristocratic consumption of his court. ([3], p. 65) In Guru Tegh Bahadur's *Hukumnama*, he often repeated the phrase "it is the time for service" (*sewa ki vela/sewa ka vaqat*). ([3], p. 87; 119) In many *Hukumnama*, the Gurus did reiterate that they would fulfil their Sikhs *rojgar* (daily subsistence/employment) indicating how the *Hukumnama* tried to address spiritual and temporal concerns.

The *Hukumnama* often contained instructions on Sikh conduct. In Banda Singh Bahadur's *Hukumnama* to Jaunpur's Sikhs, dated 1710, he urges young men to abide by the *Khalsa's* etiquette. ([3], p. 195) Bahadur tells his *Khalsa* Sikhs to carry five weapons on their person; to abandon cannabis, tobacco, opium, and alcohol; to not consume meat, fish, and onions; and to not steal and not have inappropriate sexual relations.

Due to the brevity of the *Hukumnama* style, the author rarely offered any substantiated reasons for their views.

**Modern Hukumnama** The origins of the modern *Hukumnama* can be traced to the mid-eighteenth century and the reestablishment of Amritsar as the symbolic center of Sikhism. While earlier *Hukumnama* derived their authority from the author, modern *Hukumnama* derive their authority from historic Sikh institutions. Specifically, the modern *Hukumnama* derives its authority from the five seats of authority (*Takht*). The *Akal Takht* in Amritsar is the first of five centers in India; the other four are *Kesgarh Sahib* (Punjab), *Patna Sahib* (Bihar), *Hazur Sahib* (Maharashtra), and *Damdama Sahib* (Punjab). Collectively, they form the five seats of authority (*Takht*) in the Sikh community. All five seats of authority have the power to serve *Hukumnama*. No other Sikh institution legitimately has the power to issue a *Hukumnama*.

In modern Sikh society, the *Hukumnama* has a more common meaning related to the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Every morning, a random passage of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is chosen, and that random passage is considered the Guru's order for the day. That *Hukumnama* is then read and explained. In contemporary Sikhism, the daily *Hukumnama* from Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, is considered most auspicious.

**Published Hukumnama** The early *Hukumnama* are of immense historical value, and many known letters have been published with facsimiles of the original manuscripts. But there are several unpublished *Hukumnama* available in private collections and archives. ([6], pp. 235–238) The first collection of the *Hukumnama* was published in 1967, titled *Hukumnama: Guru Sahiban, Mata Sahiban, Banda Singh ate Khalsa ji de* (Patiala: Punjabi University), edited by Ganda Singh. The second collection was also published in 1967, titled *Guru-Khalase de Nishana te Hukumnama* (Amritsar: Sikh Itihas Research Board), edited by Shamsheer Singh "Ashok." The third collection only has Guru Tegh Bahadur's letters, published in 1976, titled *Hukumnama: Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib: Panjabi, Hindi,*



*Angrezi* (Patiala: Punjabi University), edited by Fauja Singh. These original letters are in the possession of several Sikh temples, archives, and private collections across the Indian subcontinent.

## Cross-References

- [Amritsar](#)
- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Banda Bahadur](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Har Rai, Guru](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Sri Akal Takht Sahib](#)
- [Takhts](#)
- [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)
- [The Adi Granth](#)

## References

1. Ashok SS (ed) (1967) *Guru-Khalase de Nishana te Hukumname*. Sikh Itihas Research Board, Amritsar
2. Singh F (ed) (1976) *Hukumname: Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib*: Panjabi, Hindi, Angrezi. Punjabi University, Patiala
3. Singh G (ed) (1967) *Hukumname: Guru Sahiban, Mata Sahiban, Banda Singh ate Khalsa ji de*. Punjabi University, Patiala
4. Harji Sodhi, Goshti Guru Miharivanu (ed) (1974) *Govindnath Rajguru*. Panjab University, Publication Bureau, Chandigarh
5. Sainapati, Kavi Sainapati rachit Sri Gur Sobha (ed) (1996) *Ganda Singh*. Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Mann GS (2008) Sources for the study of guru Gobind Singh's life and times. *J Punjab Stud* 15:229–280

---

## Hymns of the Sikh Guru

- [Poetry of the Sikh Gurus](#)

---

**Image**

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Inference**

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Immorality**

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

**Insight**

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Imperial Power and Sikh Tradition**

- [Sikhs and Empire](#)

---

**Instruction**

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

---

**Indian Army**

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

---

**Intellection**

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Induction**

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Intelligence**

- [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Janamsakhis

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Janamsakhis are a central genre of Sikh literature. These texts narrate events in which Guru Nanak is thought to have precipitated in conjunction with his poetry. In the context of modern Sikhism, the janamsakhis have alternately been understood as biographical, pseudobiographical, and hagiographical. They have been construed as being mythic, legendary, and historical in order to create an analytic ground for understanding the life of Guru Nanak. The janamsakhi genre remains a central literary component in Sikhi.

### The Janamsakhi Literature in the Sikh Tradition

The janamsakhi literature forms a unique genre in the Sikh tradition which over the course of its development comes to describe a body of writing which relates events associated with holy men such as *bhaktas*, *sants*, and *faqirs* to the poetry

which they wrote, that is to say their *shabads* or *saloks*. As such, the literature is a composite of quasiprose and poetry; it also incorporates mythic, legendary, and historical elements in order to flesh out the narrative. In the context of modern Sikhism, the janamsakhis have alternately been understood as biographical, pseudobiographical, and hagiographical. [1, 2, 4, 7, 8] Time and space do not function in the manner with which a modern reader is accustomed in prose forms such as the novel. In the janamsakhis, the narration is not necessarily teleological, but at times incorporates a broad telos, and the characters are not limited to temporal notions of time and space – it is not uncommon to stylistically subsume large gaps in time or space through techniques of elision and/or ellipsis when narrative elements are not relevant to the radical event which provokes the expression of a poem. [4, 5] The janamsakhi literature is commonly thought to have developed in manuscript form largely around the figure of Guru Nanak, but as the genre continued to evolve it began to be used affectively for recounting the lives of other important figures in Sikh hermeneutics such as Sheikh Farid Shakkar Ganj, Kabir, Ravidas, Sri Chand, and other Sikh Gurus. [5] Despite much scholarly focus toward historically analyzing the narratives of Guru Nanak's life contain therein, the janamasakhi is not history nor is it strictly historical; this genre acts as a creative

force in the tradition. [7] As the janamsakhi genre shapes and forms how Sikhs relate to the body of sacred hymns contained within the *Guru Granth Sahib* as well as how they construe the embodiment of sacred acts, the genre remains central to endeavors engaging with or unpacking the Sikh tradition.

While the precise dating of janamsakhi manuscripts has proven to be difficult, it is likely that they began to be written shortly after Guru Nanak passed away. [4, 8] However, the formative period for the genre occurred during the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century. [4, 5] While scholars debate over where most of the manuscripts were written, it is thought the area around Lahore and the Gurdaspur district were centers of copying and producing the janamsakhis. [6, 9] After the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849 and the establishment of printing presses, the janamsakhi literature continued to circulate widely with the Bala version being the most popular. There are five major janamsakhi traditions that describe events associated with Guru Nanak. These overlap in their general narrative but diverge at certain points in their narratives. These five are: (1) *The Puratan Janamsakhi* (2) *The Bala Janamsakhi* (3) *The Miharban Tradition* (4) *The Bhai Mani Singh Janamsakhi* (5) *The Mahima Prakash Tradition*. [4, 5, 8] Other important versions include the *Adi Sakhi*, *The B40 Janamsakhi*, [6] and the *LDP-194 Janamsakhi*. [10] The five major traditions are each comprised of numerous manuscripts which bear a close likeness in the inclusion of certain narratives as well as the general organization of the individual narrative events.

Prior to annexation, the janamsakhis had developed organically to meet the needs of the intellectuals who represented and spoke for the Sikh *panth* at sacred sites such as *dharamsalas* and *gurdwaras* as well as at the local level in smaller *sangats*. [7, 8] This is attested for by the numerous renditions which entered the European accounts of the Sikhs such as those by Sir John Malcolm and J.D. Cunningham. [1, 2] With the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the British needed to understand who the Sikhs were and what motivated them. This naturally led to an

interest in their religion, which would come to be known as Sikhism. A German scholar named Ernst Trumpp would eventually be selected to assist in this task by translating the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It is well known that Trumpp encountered difficulties in the translation and had decided to include a janamsakhi narrative in his introduction in order to acquaint unfamiliar European readers with the Sikh religion. [11] When the janamsakhi narratives were first brought into European languages, they all employed the language of history and were written with the express interest in communicating something about Sikhs as central referents to the notion of the Sikh religion. Thus, they were all participating in the process of religion making. However, it was just shortly after, in 1913 with the publication of Karam Singh's Punjabi language book, *Kattak ki Visakh*, when the historicization process entered Sikh consciousness coalescing around the idea of the historical personage of Guru Nanak. [9] The debates regarding the janamsakhis have since then remained largely confined to the discourse of the History of Religions with the focus shifting between the life of Guru Nanak and the social life of the Sikh community of the eighteenth century. These debates are very informative and have provided a broad context for the understanding of the Early Sikh Tradition however, it should be remembered that these interests are underwritten by the process of colonisation and bear the mark of a problematic tenuous dynamic of dominance, translation, autoimmunity and self-orientalization which places the burden for explaining European interests upon native elites. [3] As such the discourse surrounding the janamsakhis is implicit in the nature of not only coloniality but the structures of dominance which continue unabated in postcolonial South Asia.

## Cross-References

- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Sikhi](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Cunningham JD (1853) A history of the Sikhs: from the origin of the nation to the battles of the Sutlej, 2nd edn. J. Murray, London
2. Malcolm J (1812) Sketch of the Sikhs; a singular nation, who inhabit the provinces of the Punjab, situated between the rivers Jumna and Indus. J. Murray, London
3. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
4. McLeod WH (1968) Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion. Oxford University Press, London
5. McLeod WH (1980) Early Sikh tradition: a study of the Janamsakhis. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
6. McLeod WH (ed) (1980) The B40 Janam-sakhi. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
7. Nayar KE, Sandhu JS (2008) The socially involved renunciate: Guru Nanak's discourse to the Nath yogis. SUNY, New York
8. Singh K (1969) Janamsakhi Parampara. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh P (1974) Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
10. Singh G (ed) (1995) Ldp-194 Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Gur Chetna Prakashak, Amritsar
11. Trumpp E (ed) (1877) The Adi Granth or the holy scriptures of the Sikhs. William H. Allen, London

## Japa

### ► Meditation (Sikhism)

## Japji

Randeep Hothi  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

### Japji Sahib

## Main Text

Japji, almost always referred to as *Japji Sahib*, is a hymn introduced by Guru Nanak Sahib. “Jap”

literally means to recite, repeat, or say. “Ji” and “Sahib” are honorifics. It is the hymn most often recited by Sikhs and is within the set of five daily *nitnem* hymns. According to historiographer Hew McLeod, due to its thematic address of wide-spanning theological topics, *Japji Sahib* is the most important hymn in the studying of Sikh thought. [1] Although it is understood that the *Japji Sahib* was introduced by Guru Nanak, its precise date of origination is unknown.

Although the *Japji Sahib* is recited routinely and throughout the day, the *Japji Sahib* is associated as a morning hymn and practitioners tend to recite it at *Amrit Vela* (in the morning, predawn) or while readying in the morning (N, p. 43). The *Sikh Rahyat Maryada*, a codified system of conduct compiled in 1950, includes the commitment to recite the *Japji Sahib* daily to all *Amritdhari/Khalsa* Sikhs, constituting one of the five hymns in the *nitnem* (def: nit, daily; neym, principle). [1] The *Japji Sahib*, not to be confused with *Jaap Sahib*, is (as is *Jaap Sahib*) recited at the initiation process in which one becomes *Amritdhari/Khalsa*.

The *Japji Sahib* consists of 38 stanzas followed by one *sloka*. The term for stanza is *pauri* (lit: step). It is normally recited without musical accompaniment, as the *Guru Granth Sahib* does not assign any *raga* to the verse. The total hymn spans from page, or *ang* (definition: limb), one to eight. There is general disagreement about whether the *Japji Sahib* begins with the *Mul Mantar* (*mul*, essence, primordial source; *mantar*, a mode of recitation, alternatives: root formula), the verse located at the outset in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. [2–4] However, it is widely accepted that the *sloka* verse found at page 8 marks the final verse of the *Japji Sahib*.

The text of the *Japji Sahib* spans across various languages and linguistic registers with free use of Braj, Punjabi, Old Hindi, Farsi, Arabic, and Sanskrit. The stanzas, also known as *pauris*, of the *Japji Sahib* generally vary in poetic form and structure. Stanzas VIII to XI, XII to XV, and XVIII to XXXI follow a more fixed structure. Throughout the text, anaphora remains one of the most apparent patterns in the *Japji Sahib* [6].



The following is a condensed outline of *Japji Sahib* [5]:

1. The need to follow the divine command and will (hukam)
2. List of the universal operations of the divine command
3. List of those who sing the praises of God, the indescribable one
4. Praise of God and Name
5. Praise of the divine manifestations. (refrain A: invocation to the guru)
6. Praise of the guru's teachings (refrain A)
7. Impossibility of human description of the divine
- 8–11. Lists of possible results of listening to the Name (refrain B: the blessings of the Name)
- 12–15. Lists of the results of acceptance (refrain C: how the Name is to be known through acceptance)
16. Praise of the saints and of the divine power (refrain D: the formless one is beyond description)
17. List of the countless types of good people (refrain D)
18. List of the countless types of bad people (refrain D)
19. List of attributes of the unknowable divinity (refrain D)
20. The power of the Name to save, and the responsibility of man for actions
21. Unknowability of the moment of creation
22. How the scriptures are unable to describe creation
23. How all praise is inadequate and all worldly wealth inferior to devotion
24. How God surpasses all efforts to praise him
25. The infinite bounty of God
26. The list of God's attributes, far beyond the ability of any to describe him
27. Great hymn to all those who sing to the Lord
28. Attributes to the true yogi (refrain E: all hail to the Primal Being!)"
- 29–31. Celebration of the universal power of the divine (refrain E)
32. Inability of the human tongue to describe him
33. How all that happens is by divine will
34. The realm of righteous action
- 35–36. The realm of wisdom
37. The realm of action and the realm of truth
38. Summary of the discipline needed for spiritual transformation by divine favor." [5] The *slok*, a verse form that tends to convey moral and philosophical concerns, with which the *Japji Sahib* ends, has a slow, deliberative movement. The ideas of this shalok include a celebration of the earth as mother and day and night as two nurses. [6] The *slok* ends stating the ends of reciting the Name and is resembled by the shalok of ang 146, composed by Guru Angad.

## Cross-References

► [Guru](#)

## References

1. McLeod WH (1995) Historical dictionary of Sikhism. Scarecrow Press, London
2. McLeod H (1999) Sikhs and Sikhism. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
3. Nesbitt E (2005) Sikhism a very short introduction. Oxford University Press, New York
4. Cole WO (2004) Understanding Sikhism. Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh
5. Mandair A, Shackle C (2005) Teachings of the Sikh Gurus selections from the Sikh scriptures. Routledge, London/New York
6. Talib GS (1977) Japuji the immortal prayer Chant. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi

---

**Japji Sahib**

► [Japji](#)

---

**Jivan-Mukti**

► [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Jati**

► [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

**Juga**

► [Time \(Sikhism\)](#)

# K

---

## Kaal

► [Time \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Kabir

Susan Prill  
Department of Religious Studies, Juniata College,  
Huntingdon, PA, USA

### Definition

Kabir (fl. fifteenth century) was a low-caste Sant from Varanasi who composed hymns in a precursor to Modern Hindi.

### Life and Works

Kabir is one of the most renowned names in Indian religious history. He is revered by members of many different religious communities, including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. An important Hindu sect, the Kabir Panth, treats him as a human manifestation of the Divine. School children learn his compositions, and social reformers look to him for pithy quotations. However, relatively little is known about the historical Kabir, and scholars continue to debate which compositions he actually wrote. What is known is that he sang in the vernacular, in

a regional language related to modern Hindi, and lived in Varanasi as a weaver of the *julaha* caste, probably dying in nearby Magahar. Kabir is generally considered to have been the most important representative of the Sant tradition, a religious reform movement of medieval North India. [13]

Kabir's dates are the subject of some controversy. Traditional dates often give him an impossibly long life span (120 or even 300 years) in order to assure that he could meet all of the figures the hagiographical material associates with him. Most scholars place him in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Equally controversial is Kabir's sectarian identity. The name "Kabir" is Muslim, but there is little in his compositions to suggest that he was at any point a practicing Muslim. Charlotte Vaudeville has suggested that he may have belonged to a low-caste community which had only recently converted to Islam. ([14], pp. 69–73) The poems of Kabir which appear to be most authentic display more familiarity with Hinduism and with the Nath Yogi sect than with Islam. A popular hagiographical story states that on Kabir's death, Hindus and Muslims both tried to claim his body, but found only a pile of flowers where it had been. Muslims thus were able to bury the flowers and Hindus cremated them, and Kabir has both a Muslim mausoleum and a Hindu temple at the traditional site of his death. ([6], pp. 39–41, [15], p. 15)

The oldest manuscripts of Kabir poems belong to three different religious groups. Possibly the oldest is the *Guru Granth* of the Sikh religion

(1604), which contains more than 400 compositions by Kabir. The *Dadu Panth*, a sect founded in the name of the Rajasthani saint Dadu, has collected Kabir poems in several anthologies, most notably the early seventeenth century *Pañc-Vani*, which contains more than 700 Kabir poems. [1] The *Bijak* of Kabir is a seventeenth century text associated with the Kabir Panth. There are a number of compositions which are found in all three of these sources, but each also has a large number of compositions that are unique to it. Additionally, there are a large number of poems attributed to Kabir in the modern oral tradition that may not be traceable to any manuscript and may in fact be relatively modern compositions. It is thus nearly impossible to conclusively state that Kabir did or did not author a particular poem.

The poems which scholars feel have the best chance of being authentic to Kabir share several characteristics. Kabir poems are generally composed in blunt, almost coarse, language and focus on several key themes: (1) the inevitability of death, (2) the futility of ritual, (3) the importance of avoiding the snares of Illusion (*maya*), and (4) the exhortation to praise Ram's name. [4] *Ram* is a name of God in North India that may or may not indicate an incarnation of Vishnu, depending on context. Kabir most often uses it in its most generic sense, but its usage sometimes appears to be more explicitly Vaishnava (Vishnu-worshipping). ([5], p. 292)

Kabir is important in the Sikh context as a *bhagat*, a word derived from the same source as *bhakti* (devotion), and used in Sikhism to indicate a composer of hymns consistent with Sikh ideology who predated the first Sikh Guru, Nanak. The Sikh holy text, the *Guru Granth*, contains three long compositions, 225 *sabads* (hymns) and 243 *saloks* (couplets) attributed to Kabir. ([12], p. 83) This makes him by far the most frequently represented *bhagat* and in fact means that he has more compositions in the *Guru Granth* than some of the Sikh Gurus.

## Kabir in Modern India

Kabir has both religious and political importance in modern times. He is the focus of worship for the

*Kabir Panth*, a sect named in his honor, is frequently cited as a social reformer or advocate for lower caste uplift [11], and is viewed as a role model for interreligious understanding. [7] Kabir is thus highly significant in modern discussions of caste and of Hindu-Muslim relations.

The *Kabir Panth* is a religious lineage centered in Varanasi which traces its origins to Kabir. Its chief texts are the *Bijak* of Kabir and the *Anurag Sagar*, which treats Kabir as a Divine manifestation. ([6], p. 48) The *Kabir Panth* has several sects, one of which performs ritual worship of an image of Kabir. Kabir's *Bijak* is also ritually worshipped in some Kabir Panth groups. ([6], p. 184, n. 36, [10], pp. 225–237)

Because Kabir's poems make frequent reference to his occupation as a weaver, a low caste in India, his poetry has frequently been cited as an inspiration to low-caste groups in India. In his poetry, Kabir's commentary on caste tends to revolve around two main points: his own lowly occupation and the condemnation of corruption amongst the high castes. The latter is often presented in a sharp tone: "You call yourself high-caste/but you eat at the expense/of the low caste:/You fill your belly/by doing wayward deeds." ([2], p. 201)

Kabir had similarly strong words for orthodox practitioners of both Islam and Brahmanical Hinduism. In this context, he would often assert that "The Master of Hindus and Turks/is one and the same." ([2], p. 229) This has led some to propose that Kabir be revered as a unifier of Hindus and Muslims. It is more accurate, though, to understand Kabir as rejecting both traditions equally emphatically ([3], p. 285), and tradition suggests that members of both groups attempted to harm him. ([9], pp. 4–5)

While Kabir was certainly concerned and angry about ritualistic religion and caste, his motivation was not only social reform. As a devotee of a formless God, Kabir felt it was logically consistent to reject not just deities with forms but all external trappings of religiosity, which he clearly viewed as ego driven. Kabir repeatedly addresses his audience with what Linda Hess has called "rough rhetoric," condemning them for hypocrisy and demanding that they turn their hearts toward the Divine. [8] It is this rhetoric which has helped

make Kabir such a memorable figure and which has contributed to his cross-religious appeal in the Indian context.

## Cross-References

- [Bhagats](#)
- [Bhakti \(bhagti\)](#)
- [Sant\(s\)](#)
- [Sants](#)

## References

1. Callewaert WM, Op de Beeck B (1991) Devotional Hindi literature, vols I–II. Manohar, New Delhi
2. Dass N (1991) Songs of Kabir from the Adi Granth. SUNY Press, Albany
3. Dvivedi H (2005) Kabir's place in Indian religious practice. In: Lorenzen DN (ed) Religious movements in South Asia 600–1800. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. Gold D (1987) The lord as guru: Hindi sants in north Indian tradition. Oxford University Press, New York
5. Hawley JS (2005) Three bhakti voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in their times and ours. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
6. Hawley JS, Juergensmeyer M (1988) Songs of the saints of India. Oxford University Press, New York
7. Hedayetullah M (1977) Kabir: the apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
8. Hess L (1987) Kabir's rough rhetoric. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) The sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
9. Hess L, Singh S (2002) The Bijak of Kabir. Oxford University Press, Oxford
10. Lorenzen DN (1996) Praises to a formless god: Nirguni texts from north India. Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi
11. Martin NM (2002) Homespun threads of dignity and protest: songs of Kabir in rural Rajasthan. In: Horstmann M (ed) Images of Kabir. Manohar, New Delhi
12. Singh P (2003) The bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh self-definition and the bhagat bani. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
13. Vaudeville C (1987) Sant Mat: santism as the universal path to sanctity. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) The sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
14. Vaudeville C (1993) A weaver named Kabir: selected verses with a detailed biographical and historical introduction. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
15. Westcott GH (1907) Kabir and the Kabir Panth. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi. Reprinted 1986

---

## Karam

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Karma

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Karnavedha

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Keertan

- [Kirtan \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Keshkee

- [Turban \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Khalistan

Jasdev Singh Rai  
Sikh Human Rights Group, British Sikh  
Consultative Forum, Southall, Middlesex, UK

---

## Synonyms

[Sikh homeland](#); [Sikh nationalism](#)

---

## Definition

Khalistan, the Sikh State, Brief history, Viability, and Possibilities.



## Khalistan: The Sikh State

Khalistan is the proposed name of a Sikh State. It became a serious call following the attack on *Sri Darbar Sahib* (Golden Temple) by the Indian Armed Forces in June 1984. The call for a Sikh State had been made earlier in 1945 during the Indian decolonization struggle in response to Muslim demand for Pakistan.

### Call for Sikh State in 1946

The Sikh political party, the *Akali Dal* announced that if Muslims were to be granted Pakistan, then the Sikhs will demand a separate Sikh State. The Sikhs were a formidable force in the Indian struggle against colonial rule. But the call for a Sikh State was weak political posturing driven by the fear that the Sikhs could lose a lot of their historic institutions to Muslim Pakistan. The *Akali Dal* hoped that their rhetorical call would stop Pakistan being.

In 1946, the *Akali Dal* passed a resolution in its annual conference for a Sikh State. ([1], p. 100) However, neither was this a well-argued or thought-out demand, nor it was pursued further. Whereas the proposition of Indian Muslims being a distinct nation needing a separate state, Pakistan, had been suggested as early as 1930 by Mohammed Iqbal in a lecture in which he propounded the two nations theory, no such idea had been mooted by Sikhs until the demand for Pakistan became serious in 1940s. In 1946, a booklet was published by Gurbachan Singh and Lal Singh Gyani titled “The Idea of a Sikh State.” [2]

Singh and Gyani argued that since the Sikhs were a nation, the Sikhs deserve a Sikh State. Quoting Sedgwick, Lord Bryce, and Vernon, they concluded that “the Sikh claim to nationhood is clear and simple. Common memories, common aspirations, common literature, common language and culture all combine to make the Sikhs a nation.” To preempt any objections from critics, they asserted, “In such matters as the determination of nationhood of a group, ultimately no laws can be of any avail, because the appeal in such

cases lies solely to the forces of the will of the group to be accepted in a certain character by the rest of the world.” ([2], p. 23) In other words, if a people were forcefully successful in asserting themselves as a nation, the world would simply accept it.

Singh and Gyani’s book was too late in the decolonization struggle to inspire a further debate for a coherent strategy for Sikhs to declare nationhood. The essential premises of the argument rested on the *Khalsa* (body of *Amritdhari* Sikhs) being a political conception of a nation. The book failed to address some of the key issues, such as the rights of *non-Amritdhari* (initiated) Sikhs or non-Sikhs in any detail. It also did not touch on the centrality of Sri Akal Takht to Sikhs as a people.

In 1947, when the transfer of power took place, the Sikhs were too disorganized and ill prepared to force through a demand for a separate state. Perhaps more importantly, the *Akali Dal* had already reached an agreement with the Indian Congress Party in 1929 at Lahore, ([3], p. 261) which it was confident would protect Sikh interests and Sikhs as a community. Comfortable with this, the *Akali Dal* did not feel an overwhelming compulsion to pursue a separate Sikh State as a serious proposal. The issue of *Khalistan* was almost forgotten, while the Sikhs concentrated on the 1929 agreement. *Khalistan* became an issue again when it became apparent that India was not going to honor this agreement.

### The 1929 Agreement

The 1929 agreement reached at the Annual Congress Conference in Lahore concentrated on two issues. One was that India would be a federal State with autonomous provinces. The Federal Government would have total control of a few fields such as currency, defense, communications, and foreign policy. The provincial states would have legislative power over all other fields. The other is that the minorities and especially the Sikhs would have a veto over any constitutional article that did not protect their interests as a minority.

The Congress Party in power reneged on these agreements with the Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel blatantly retorting “Agreements, what agreements?” ([4], p. 279) The Constitution is highly centrist with little, if any, protection for minorities. When the Constitution was presented for ratification in 1949, two of the elected Sikh representatives of *Akali Dal*, Hukam Singh and Ujjal Singh, refused to consent to the Constitution. Hukam Singh went on record to say, “My community cannot subscribe its assent to this historic (Constitution) document.” ([5], pp. 749–753) The experience left a bitter feeling of betrayal. The *Akali Dal* was devastated and marginalized in the grand political game of South Asia.

Having lost real power, the first challenge the Sikhs faced was when the Indian States were being reorganized along linguistic lines in 1955. The Sikh language, Punjabi, was denied state recognition. *Akali Dal* embarked on a long campaign. Its leaders went on fasts and nearly 80,000 Sikhs courted arrest. The Government finally relented in 1966 following a war with Pakistan in which the Sikh contribution was an influential factor. The Punjab was divided into a Hindu-dominated Haryana and a Sikh majority Punjabi-speaking Punjab, and a small bit went to Himachal Pradesh. The issue of autonomy however remained.

On 13 October 1971, a maverick Sikh politician, Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan, who had migrated to the UK having lost his seat as a legislative assembly member in Punjab, took up an advertisement in The New York Times proclaiming an independent Sikh State, *Khalistan*. He set up *Khalistan* National Council in 1977.

## The Anandpur Sahib Resolution

In 1973, the *Akali Dal* put forward a new agenda to renegotiate the autonomy issue. It added a few other demands, such as a radio station and better prices for farm produce. It called the package, *Anandpur Sahib Resolution*, ([1], p. 214) because the resolutions were made at the historic Sikh city of *Anandpur Sahib*. However, before it could become a major movement, the Indian Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi suspended democracy in

India in 1975 [6] under the pretext of threat to internal security because she was charged with corruption in Indian courts. During this “emergency,” the Sikhs turned their attention to ending her dictatorial rule. ([7], p. 213)

The campaign for autonomy was restarted when a charismatic young leader from Sikh seminary, the *Damdami Taksal*, Jarnail Singh Bhindrawallah started taking an interest in the campaign and competed with the *Akali Dal* for leadership and went on to become extremely powerful. ([8], pp. 146–147) The campaign took on a dangerous turn when some leading members of the Bhindrawallah camp were detained and tortured and some even extrajudicially executed by the police services. This led to counter State insurgency and a cycle of violence. The security forces hounded leading members of Bhindrawallah, usually torturing them and often killing them extrajudicially. Bhindrawallah’s followers retaliated by killing police officers, politicians, civil servants, and media moguls allegedly promoting the policy of oppression. ([4], pp. 365–366)

Bhindrawallah was joined by a hundred or so of ex-army officers and a large powerful student body, the All India Sikh Students Federation. Bhindrawallah and his followers took refuge in *Sri Akal Takht Sahib*, the temporal seat of Sikh religious community. The Indian Government reacted to the increasing violence by attacking the *Darbar Sahib* (Golden Temple) [9] and 38 other Sikh Gurdwaras ([10], pp. 596–597) in Punjab on 1 June 1984. A number of Sikhs were killed. The figures vary between 200 from the Government and 5,000 from independent human rights organizations.

## Indian Attack on Sri Darbar Sahib (1984) and Khalistan

The worldwide Sikh reaction was one of horrors. Three weeks later, a conference called by some Sikh leaders in London passed a resolution calling for a Sikh State, *Khalistan*. Similar conferences took place in Canada and the USA. A worldwide but fragmented movement campaigning for *Khalistan* began. New organizations emerged

among Sikhs to take it forward. Dr Chauhan set up a Government in exile in the UK. [11] The Government of India reacted with alarm and embarked on determined effort to subvert the movement by all means.

The calls for *Khalistan* from around the world were made into a formal resolution on 29 April 1986 at a large gathering of Sikhs at the Akal Takht in Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) in defiance of Indian security forces. It was called by Sikh organizations in the form of *Surbutt Khalsa*, the traditional gathering of worldwide Sikhs.

The campaign in Punjab was met with further violent measures by the Indian State leading to a long protracted insurgency. A number of militant Khalistani organizations emerged in India with names such as Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Liberation Force, Khalistan Tiger Force, Bhindrawallah Tiger Force, Khalistan National Army, and Babbar Khalsa. Almost all their members were underground or had taken refuge in neighboring Pakistan. Some organizations remained committed to a political struggle and refrained from taking up arms, despite their members being detained illegally, tortured, or executed extrajudicially. These included the All India Sikh Students Federation which became Sikh Students Federation in 1990, the *Shiromani Akali Dal* (Amritsar, Mann), the *Dal Khalsa*.

Internationally two large organizations carried on the campaign. One was the International Sikh Youth Federation and the other was *Babbar Khalsa International*. Most other organizations outside South Asia were connected to one or the other of these two large organizations. Both had contacts with organizations in Punjab. Despite being committed to peaceful political struggle internationally, India's political pressure and the actions of some rogue members got them proscribed in 2003.

The 1986 declaration became the inspiration for subsequent campaigns. But apart from the declaration, accusations of betrayals, and allegations about the excesses of the security forces, the argument for *Khalistan* was not taken forward beyond a reaction to events and sense of

persecution, deception, and marginalization. It was and remains a response to victimization rather than a campaign based on ideology of coherent nationalism. There was and still is not any coherent concept of the Sikh State. For instance, the status of *non-Amritdhari* (nonbaptized) Sikhs in the governing system, the issue of equality for non-Sikhs, and freedom of religious conscience have not been addressed beyond rhetorical statements similar to those in the Singh and Gyani's book of 1946. The campaign for *Khalistan* fizzled under an aggressive and oppressive approach taken by the State of India and a lack of intellectual core to sustain it.

## Hope and Conflict in Khalistan Proposal

There are also some fundamental conflicts with Sikh teachings. The Sikh State that has been proposed so far is based on European ideas of a Nation State where a large group of people with shared culture, history, and ethnicity have a historic claim to be a nation and to a territory. Such a Sikh State would deprive non-Sikhs from high office and ensure that non-Sikhs do not form a majority. It would encourage discrimination against non-Sikhs and Sikhs who do not take *Amrit* (initiation service) to ensure its own character as a Sikh State. *Sikhi* however promotes a commitment to plurality, respect for all beliefs, respect for all humanity, and welfare of all regardless of race, caste, belief, or background. The European form of a Sikh Nation State and *Sikhi* are not compatible. ([12], pp. 25–33)

*Khalistan* is a viable proposition if the State governance is instituted along Sikh principles and values rather than just by Sikhs. This would be a plural State with opportunities for anyone regardless of religion or background to take up political offices of the State. However, this requires the Sikh nationalists to develop a political theory that would be consistent with teachings of the Gurus and yet protect Sikh institutions. An idea that is often talked about is called "*halimi raj*" or benign rule. However, no credible detailed theory has yet been developed on this.

An alternative view is that the concept of nation in the Sikhs is a nonterritorial one. ([12], pp. 29–33) With *Akal Takht* as its sovereign institution, the Sikhs are a globalized or dispersed nation whose coherence and strength is not based on the European idea of a territorial nation. Such a nation is called a *qaum* within Sikh political language. The *qaum's* existence is not dependent on territorial boundaries but boundaries of values, practices, and a way of life.

*Khalistan* is a call for a Sikh State made in response to events and modeled on the modern nation-state theory. However, it is an undeveloped proposal that does not yet inspire much support within the Sikh community because of contradictions with Sikhi. It has almost no support among non-Sikhs in Punjab. The *qaum* as a nonterritorialized nation is gaining ground among Sikhs. The idea of a *Khalistan* based on the pluralistic theory of *halimi raj* or Sikh principles is however a viable proposition if and when a credible theory of “*halimi raj*” is developed.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Akali Dal
- ▶ Blue Star (Operation)
- ▶ Dal Khalsa
- ▶ Sri Akal Takht Sahib

## References

1. Grewal JS (1996) The akalis, a short history. Punjab Studies Publication, Chandigarh, p 100
2. Gurbachan S, Singh GL (1946) The idea of the Sikh state. Lahore Book Shop, Lahore
3. Zaidi AM, Zaidi SG The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, vol IX
4. Sangat S (1996) The Sikhs in history. Uncommon Books, New Delhi
5. Constituent Assembly Debates (India), vol VI
6. Palmer ND India in 1975: democracy in eclipse. Asian Survey 16:5
7. Grewal JS (1990) The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
8. Robin J (1994) What's happening to India? 2nd edn. Holmes & Meier Publishing, New York
9. Brar KS (2008) Operation blue star, the true story. UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd., New York
10. Marty ME (1995) The fundamentalism project. University of Chicago Press, Chicago
11. The New York Times, USA, “London Sikh assumes role of exile chief” 14 June 1984
12. Jasdev R (2011) Khalistan is dead long live khalistan. Sikh Formations 7(1):1–41

## Khalsa

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

The term *Khalsa* refers simultaneously to a spiritual-cum-military order started by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh guru, and the form of embodied consciousness a Sikh adherent takes on prior to engaging in the Sikh praxis and culminating in participating in an initiatory rite *khande ka pahul* that today is known as taking *amrit*.

## Establishing a Sovereign Order

According to traditional Sikh sources, Guru Gobind Singh fulfilled Guru Nanak's mission through the creation of the *Khalsa* on *Baisakhi* day of 1699, an event that has become central to the Sikh psyche. [1, 3, 6] He did this by staging a dramatic spectacle that was heavily layered with mystical and political resonances. In accordance with the Guru's *hukamnamas*, or epistles, a large crowd had gathered at Anandpur on the evening of 30 March 1699. [6] The Guru came out of a tent, sword in hand, he asked if there was one among them who was willing to sacrifice his or her head for the Guru. A strange hush fell on the crowd. No one answered the call. The Guru repeated his call several times until at last, one Daya Ram, a trader from Lahore, stepped forward

and offered his head. The Guru grabbed him by the arm, took him into the tent and a loud thud was heard. Shortly, the Guru came out of the tent, his sword dripping with blood. To the dismay of the congregation he called for a second willing victim. [6] This process was repeated until five Sikhs had offered their heads. The second victim was a farmer who lived within the proximity of Delhi named Dharam Das. Next was Mokham Chand, a washerman from Dwarka, who was followed by Himmat Rai, a cook from Jagganathpuri. Last was Sahib Chand, a barber from Bidar. After a short time, the Guru came out of the tent with the five willing victims all dressed in blue and saffron robes. They were introduced to the *sangat* as the Guru's five beloved ones (or *Panj Pyare*). These men, alongside the Guru, formed the nucleus of a new sovereign order called *Khalsa*. [1, 3–5, 7, 8]

## Initiation

The initiatory rite that the *Panje Pyare* and Guru Gobind Singh partook of on *Baisakhi* day of 1699 is called *khanda-ki-pahul*. The Guru placed water sweetened with sugar crystals into an iron vessel and stirred it with a double-edged sword while reciting the hymns *Japji*, *Jaap*, *Anand*, *Swayai*, and *Chaupai*. The resulting nectar, called *amrit* (lit. the elixir of life–death) was then administered to the five neophytes. As it was sprinkled in their eyes and hair, each was asked to repeat: *waheguru ji ka khalsa, waheguru ji ki fateh*. This phrase, “khalsa belongs to the true Guru (*waheguru*), to the true Guru belongs victory,” became central to the newly reinvigorated Sikh community. The culmination of the ceremony involves the initiate breaking with his/her familial names, which often indicated not only caste but tribal affiliation, and adopting a new name: *Singh* for men (meaning lion), and *Kaur* for women (meaning princess). Upon completion of this rite, the initiate becomes a *Khalsa*. From this moment on the principle was established that the five *Khalsa* Sikhs could represent the entire community and initiate other Sikhs into the order of the *Khalsa*. [1, 2, 5, 6, 8]

## The Rahit: Code of Conduct

A code of conduct also developed alongside this new community which is known as the *rahit*. They were to carry on their body five *kakar* or five Ks: (i) *kesh*: or long uncut hair signifying one's connection and affirmation of the law of nature; (ii) *kanga*: a comb to keep the hair clean and intact, also signifying an affirmation of the householder's life and a rejection of asceticism; (iii) *kirpan*: a dagger or short sword signifying the right to bear arms as well as a strict moral duty to protect life – not only one's own life but even more importantly the lives of others who cannot protect themselves; (iv) *kara*: an iron wrist ring or bracelet whose circle serves as a reminder of one's mortality, that one is bound to the circle of life and death, that one's actions are ultimately answerable to the true Guru to whom one is constantly bound, and that if one is to exercise force it must be done so with moral restraint; (v) *kacch*: or short breeches signifying the need for sexual restraint whether one is a householder or whether one is in the position to exercise power. These five Ks were to be worn as bodily signifiers marking a *Khalsa* as different from others, one who could not hide behind others in difficult times, as a householder who lived by a certain discipline. Through this new ceremony the neophytes had severed all allegiance to previous caste occupations (*krit nas*), to family ties (*kul nas*) and to previous creeds (*dharam nas*), in addition to rituals not sanctioned by the Sikh way of life. [1, 2, 6]

In creating the *Khalsa*, a new spiritual-military order was created which had been developing from the time of Guru Nanak, but which took a greater impetus from the time of Guru Hargobind. Guru Gobind Singh sought to remove inconsistencies in the type of embodiment his Sikhs were adopting, as well as challenge the sociopolitical formations of his time. From the standpoint of the downtrodden castes, however, the Guru's inauguration of the *Khalsa* represented a creative violence – like a lightning storm that fertilizes the dead soil of the social order, enabling them to flourish in the same soil as the upper castes. [6]



In doing so, he also challenged the privilege that many upper castes assumed but also the dominance and privilege of the Mughal aristocracy, which had its own developed forms of maintaining difference that included claiming decent from the Prophet amongst other things. Furthermore, since entry into the *Khalsa* made it obligatory for Sikhs to bear arms, it suggested that the Guru intended to raise an army modelled on the figure of the warrior-saint (*sant-sipahi*) combining devotional self-surrender (*bhakti*) with the ability to use force and wield power (*shakti*), thereby further embedding the ethos of *miri-piri* that had become explicit with Guru Hargobind. [1, 4, 6, 7]

## Cross-References

- [Amritdhari](#)
- [Dal Khalsa](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Tat Khalsa](#)

## References

1. Banerjee I (1963) Evolution of the Khalsa. Mukherjee, Calcutta
2. Grewal JS (2004) The Khalsa: Sikh and non-Sikh perspectives. Manohar, New Delhi
3. Grewal JS, Banga I (1999) History and ideology: the Khalsa over 300 years. Tulika, New Delhi
4. Kapur PS (1999) The Khalsa. Punjabi University, Patiala
5. Kapur SS (1999) The creation of the Khalsa: the saint-soldier. Hemkunt Press, New Delhi
6. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
7. McLeod WH (2003) Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit. Oxford University Press, Delhi
8. Singh N-GK (2005) The birth of the Khalsa: a feminist re-memory of Sikh identity. SUNY Press, Albany

## Kirtan

- [Music \(Sikh Popular and Religious\)](#)

## Kirtan (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Gurbani-Keertan](#); [Gurbani-Kirtan](#); [Gurmat-sangeet](#); [Keertan](#); [Sabad](#); [Sikh musicology](#)

## Definition

Devotional singing/singing of devotional hymns/meant to be performed in association with others (congregational gathering or *sangat*) which is a necessary part of Sikh praxis.

## Traditions of Sikh Musicology: Gurbani-Kirtan

*Kirtan* comes from the Sanskrit *kīrti* meaning to celebrate, mention, or praise. *Kirtan* is a form of narration which is celebratory or praiseworthy. [4, 6] As a form of singing, *kirtan* was popularized as a form of affective spiritual singing by *Bhaktas* and Sufis in the subcontinent. Some of the earliest known songs were composed by the *Alvar* saints in South Asia. In the twelfth century, Jayadeva composed the famous *Gitagovinda* in praise of the god Krishna while Shaikh Farid composed songs in praise of a singular divine principle. These individuals composed poetry which was sung in order to invoke an emotive response from the singers as well as their audiences. These compositions were set to music in the form of ragas. The raga selected for each composition was thought to further the ability to effectively convey the form of emotion contained in the poem. To render the raga correctly in performance is to correctly express one mood or set of emotions and not another. [4, 5, 7, 8]

Guru Nanak incorporated *kirtan* as an integral aspect to the praxis his disciples engaged in

regularly when they met collectively as a *sangat*. In order to reproduce a certain mood, traditions of Sikh musicology, variously known as *gurbani-kirtan* or *gurmat-sangeet*, stress the performance rules and melodic material as the best way of maintaining the individual properties of the raga and of allowing the finer aspect of the hymn to emerge. However, though *kirtan* is an essential aspect of Sikh worship it is subordinated to *shabad* and *nam* (word) as it is one vehicle for their expression but *kirtan* is not meant to be engaged in for mere aesthetic affectivity. As such, Sikh intellectuals have always balanced this emotive force by encouraging *nam simran* or *nitnem* – a daily private form of meditation upon the word or shabad contained within Guru Granth Sahib and listening to exegesis of the hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib. The texts which may be included in Sikh performance of *kirtan* included the Guru Granth Sahib, the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh found in the *Dasam Granth*, as well as the poetry of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. The traditional reception of these texts reinforces the unity of language and music as equal constituents of shabad. That is to say, *shabad* could be experienced as both music and language; the unity that emanated from this experience was synonymous with the attainment of a sovereign consciousness. Consequently the traditional vehicles for experiencing the philosophical and theological teaching of the Guru (*gurmat*) either through a mode of reflection (*gurmat vichar*) or through music (*gurmat sangeet*) were intrinsically connected. Musical practitioners were thinkers and devotees and vice versa, thinkers and devotees were practitioners of music. Indeed both strands (language and music) were necessary to the imparting of *gurmat*. [5, 7, 8]

The earliest anecdotes of Guru Nanak's life contained in the *Janamsakhi* literature describe how the disciples gathered around Guru Nanak would engage in *kirtan* daily – often this singing would go on through the night until it was time to recite the morning prayer, today known as *japji sahib*. He was also accompanied by a *rababi*, or rebeck player, named Mardana who was from a familial line of musicians. Mardana would play the rabab when Guru Nanak became inspired to compose a *shabad*. [2] As mentioned earlier, the

regular gathering of Sikh sangats provided the occasion for performing *kirtan*. *Kirtan* was also sung continually at the Harmandir after construction was completed and the Guru Granth was installed in 1604. As the tradition continued to develop, Sikhs were encouraged to learn music and sing *shabads* in gatherings and festivals, as well as for important life events such as birth and death. As the Sikh community continued to grow, the *dharamsalas* and *gurdwaras* became places wherein one could regularly hear *kirtan*. There are four times, or *chaukis*, when *kirtan* is performed. The first is *Asa ki vaar Chauki* performed in the early morning after *japji sahib* is recited. The second is known as *Charan Kamal* or *Bilaval Chauki* performed 4 h after sunrise. The third is *Sodar Chauki* at sunset and lastly, there is *Kalyan Chauki* performed about 1½ h after sunset. As such both listening to *kirtan* and the regular recitation of *shabads* punctuate the life of Sikhs. [4, 7]

While *rababis* continued to perform *kirtan* up until partition in 1947, a *ragi jatha* is today more typical. These groups typically contained three members including a lead singer, a harmonium player, and a tabla player. However, the number and size of these jathas has been increasing since the late 1990s. There has also been a revivalist movement occurring which seeks to reclaim the Sikh musical space away from the *ragi jathas* that are being cast as modern interventions in to the musical system developed by the Sikh gurus. During the period of colonial modernization, Sikh reformist scholars attempted to unify modern Sikh identity. Later the SGPC, the committee in charge of all major Sikh gurdwaras in the Indian province of Punjab, sought to standardize the way in which Sikh teachings (*gurmat*) were experienced. [3] The result of these movements was to refashion the experiential aspect of *gurmat* by driving a wedge between the literary (*shabad*) and the musical (*raga*) aspects of the central Sikh text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This rationalization gave rise on the one hand to a systematic theology and a belief system based around a new relationship to the text as primarily a literary and “religious” object to be understood through a proper grasp of grammar and a correct concept of the divine (monotheism). [3] And on the other

hand, it recodified the Indian system of musical notation based on *raga/tala*, according to Western staff notation. Music in general, but particularly Indian classical music, was implicitly associated with weaker, nonrepresentable forms of consciousness that correspond to improper, that is sensuous, concepts of the divine. [3] The dichotomization was implemented by the SGPC in two ways thereby affecting the key modes of receiving Sikh “scripture” (*gurbani kirtan* and *viakhia*). First, once the SGPC had approved the use of a new instrument, the harmonium, to replace the traditional string instruments associated with *gurbani kirtan*, they were able to mass produce ragis who could be easily trained to use the harmonium and quickly deployed to gurdwaras in villages and towns. Secondly, the modernized form of *kirtan* was brought into line with the literalist message of *gianis* and *pracharaks* (theologians, preachers, and missionaries) who conveyed a standardized understanding of scripture in line with the political message of the SGPC and the *Akali Dal*. By making effective use of cassette culture and other media, the SGPC helped to privatize the realm of *kirtan* which was used to keep the masses in check, leaving the public realm relatively free for their political agenda. [1, 3, 9]

While all this was taking effect in the *gurdwaras*, a similar institutionalization took place for the academic study of *kirtan*. In other words the scholarly study of *kirtan* was institutionalized under two opposing categories – the performative (secular) and the textual (religious/theological), within different departments within the modern Punjabi universities such that, one could study text history and meaning in a department of religion, history, literature, etc., but *gurbani kirtan* could only be studied in a department of music. [3] The modernist emphasis on separating the musical and the literary could hardly be more different from the premodern forms of experiencing *gurmat*. Surprisingly, though, this dichotomy is not only operative in “public” institutions such as the modern university (both in Punjab and in the West). It has also become part of the (private) experience of reception and transmission of the *Guru Granth* in the modern *gurdwara*. The result of these rationalizing

trends was to reinforce the standardization of Sikh identity as a specifically religious identity and of Sikhism as a “world religion.” [1, 3, 7]

In the last two decades, there has been something of a renaissance in the traditional styles of *gurbani kirtan*, driven by proponents such as the thirteenth-generation exponent and master, Bhai Baldeep Singh, scholars of Sikh musicology such as Dr. Gurnam Singh at Punjabi University Patiala, and teacher-entrepreneurs such as Surinder Singh Matharu in the United Kingdom and North America. [3] Today, through the efforts of such “revivalists,” traditional styles can be heard once again ironically through the very media technologies (audio, visual, print, internet) that helped to marginalize them between the 1950s and 1980s. Moreover, these revived traditional styles are once again being performed in local gurdwaras and promoted as the musical standard within the *Harimandir Sahib*. Spurred by a similar revival of the production of traditional string instruments, the performance of *gurbani kirtan* in its original classical form has also achieved a high level of popularity within Sikh diaspora communities. It has been promoted as a unique musical genre and has begun to be institutionalized as an academic discipline within Western universities. The primary interest of the revivalists is to reconnect Sikh communities to older styles of *kirtan*, the effect of this classical resurgence goes beyond the sphere of music alone. The musical revival has the potential to reconnect the sundered aspects of *raga* and *shabad* that is so central to the idea of *kirtan* developed during the early Sikh tradition. [1, 3]

## Cross-References

- [Gurmat](#)
- [Gurmat Sangeet](#)
- [Music](#)

## References

1. Kalra V (2014) Sacred and secular musics: a postcolonial approach. Bloomsbury, London
2. Kohli SS (1990) Janamsakhi Bhai Bala. Punjab University, Chandigarh

3. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
4. Mansukhani GS (1982) *Indian classical music and Sikh Kirtan*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
5. Singh G (1995) *Gurmat Sangeet*. Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Singh H (1998) *The encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
7. Singh G (2001) *Sikh musicology: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and hymns of the human spirit*. Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi
8. Singh A, Singh G (1995) *Gurbani Sangit Prachin Rita Ratanawali*. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Van der Linden B (2013) *Music and empire in Britain and India: identity, internationalism, and cross-cultural communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

---

## Kirtaniya

► [Ragis \(in Sikh Kirtan Tradition\)](#)

---

## Kirtankar

► [Ragis \(in Sikh Kirtan Tradition\)](#)

---

## Knowledge (Gian), Sikhism

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

### Synonyms

[Acquaintance](#); [Apprehension](#); [Comprehension](#);  
[Consciousness](#); [Enlightenment](#); [Instruction](#);  
[Intelligence](#)

### Definitions

Knowledge has been defined in many ways. According to the “Dictionary of Philosophy,”

knowledge has been defined as “relations known and apprehended truth.” [1] To know means to be conscious of something. Knowledge means consciousness. In another “Dictionary of Philosophy” it is told, “there are three main kinds of knowledge: (a) knowledge that or ‘factual knowledge’, (b) knowledge how or ‘practical knowledge,’ and (c) knowledge of people, places, and things or ‘knowledge by acquaintance.’ Such knowledge often involves knowledge of types (a) and (b) but does not necessarily do so. For example, one may have a vague knowledge of a person, even though one cannot state any facts about them.” [2]

Swami Satprakashananda, while commenting upon the validity of knowledge in *Advaita Vedanta*, one of the six systems of Indian philosophy says that according to Advaita Vedanta, “Knowledge is self manifest (*svatah prakasa*). It acquires no other knowledge to know it. Knowledge neither apprehends itself nor is apprehended by another knowledge. Like sunlight it shines of itself and does not require any other light for its manifestation while manifesting other things.” [3]

### Introduction

In Sikhism, “*gian*” has been used for knowledge. “Gian” is the Punjabi version of the Sanskrit word “*jnana*” which is a noun. According to “A Sanskrit English Dictionary,” the root of the word *jnana* is *vid*, originally identical with *vindata*. The meaning of the word *vid* is to find, discover, obtain, and acquire. [4] In the same source it is told that the word *jnana* means knowing, becoming acquainted with, knowledge, especially the higher knowledge derived from meditation on the universal spirit. [5] It is the level of consciousness, a state of knowing.

### Knowledge in Sikhism

According to Sikhism knowledge is self-valid because there is no non-valid knowledge. There is either knowledge or no knowledge. To make it clear the word *agian* has been used opposite to *gian*. Where there is *gian* (knowledge), *agian*

(ignorance) vanishes automatically. In the *Bani* of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, so many references could be found to this effect. Where there is gian (knowledge), there cannot be *agian* (ignorance), and if there is ignorance, knowledge (*gian*) does not exist there because ignorance vanishes immediately with the dawn of knowledge. To make it more clear, the examples of lamp and sun are cited which are the sources of light. It is told that darkness is lifted as the lamp is lit. Similarly as the sun rises, moon disappears on its own. In the same manner with the enlightenment, i.e., with the manifestation of knowledge, the illumination, ignorance vanishes immediately on its own. [6] The lamp and sun both being the source of light do not need any other source for their manifestation. In the same way knowledge does not need any other source to manifest it, it is self manifested. Knowledge itself is its source of manifestation. It shines on its own. *Gian* is light and ignorance is darkness. As told by the fifth Guru Arjan Dev that suffering and darkness of ignorance is eliminated from the heart of such on whom the Guru conferred illumination, a lamp is lighted within them. [7] Darkness of ignorance was lifted, as was lighted the lamp of illumination by the Guru. [8] It is also termed *gian-anjan* (collyrium) of realization as translated by Pro. G.S. Talib. *Anjan* is applied to the eyes to see more clearly, to make the eyesight more perfect. So according to Sikh philosophy, collyrium of realization shatters the fear of death (*Yama*). One is able to view the Immaculate (*Niranjan*). *Gian* enables the seeker to view the Lord as hidden and manifest in all spots. [9] At another place it is told that he, in whose eyes collyrium of enlightenment (*gian-anjan*) is applied, beholds the Divine illumination in all. One caught in darkness of ignorance (here again is termed as darkness) cannot see anything because of which he strays again and again. [10]

In Sikhism, three ways of knowing have been accepted: knowledge through perception (perceptual knowledge), through reason (rational knowledge), and through intuition (intuitive knowledge). The first kind of knowledge is acquired through the senses organs. It is also called non-inferential knowledge. According to Bertrand Russell, “when we speak of ‘knowledge’, we generally imply

a distinction between the knowing and what is known, but in sensation there is no such distinction. ‘Perception’, as the word is used by most psychologists, is of the nature of knowledge, but it is so because of the adjuncts which are added to pure sensation by experience, or, possibly by congenital disposition.” [11]

In Sanskrit language, as observed by Swami Satprakashananda, perception has been termed as “*pratyaksa*,” which etymologically means the function of any sense organ with respect to its object. It refers to sense perception as a means of direct or immediate knowledge, not merely the process of sensory knowledge. Thus, as a substantive, *pratyaksa* denotes a *pramana* that leads to direct and valid knowledge. [12] So perception means the direct knowledge. In its broader sense, perception is twofold: external and internal. When one gets the perception through any one of the sensory organs of hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling, it is external perception. Internal perception is the mental perception of pleasure and pain, knowledge and ignorance, love and hate, etc. The knowledge of external things which is acquired through sense perception is the most natural and direct knowledge. As remarked by a Western scholar, “Knowledge of appearance is revealed to us immediately in the sensory experience of how things look, how they feel, how they sound, and smell and taste. Every perception, besides revealing a certain group of qualities does also point beyond itself and contain an anticipatory judgement which would make it cognitive, even in the sense required.” [13]

In *Japuji*, the composition of Guru Nanak, in the very first reference to *gian* (knowledge) it has been used in both the senses of perceptual knowledge as well as rational knowledge. Initially it is mentioned that the number of devotees is countless. This refers to perception. It is further pointed out that reflection on the qualities of higher Reality leads to knowledge. This is rational knowledge which leads to the devotion of man to the higher Reality. [14] It is further told in *Japuji* that to apprehend the higher truth, perceptual knowledge is very necessary which is the first step towards knowing. It is termed as *gian khand*, [15] the region of knowledge. In this region, the seeker



acquires the knowledge of many kinds of wind, water, and fire or heat. It means he acquires both the empirical as well as the perceptual knowledge of various objects of the world. The seeker learns the cause and effect of various events, objects, and relations and the process of generation and death and of heavenly bodies. He is required to know the world, planets, the solar system, the stars, the moons, and the sons. This is the one aspect of knowing by *perception*, which is concerned with the knowledge of geographical regions, with the laws of nature, of generation and destruction, and the heavenly bodies. The second aspect of perception is the knowledge of society and the principles of social relations, of the many religious practices of the people, of their myths, and of symbols. The third aspect of this kind of knowing by perception is related with the cultural traditions of the people, the literary and historical aspect of man, their efforts, and achievements in the field of learning and wisdom. It becomes clear that according to Sikhism, the field of perceptual knowledge is very wide. It expands the consciousness of the seeker in very vast directions. It is the first and a necessary step for a seeker of truth to cover all these fields of knowledge. Sohan Singh, a scholar of Sikhism, while interpreting *gian khand*, has observed, "The first condition of obtaining His Grace in one's life is to open out one's consciousness so that it may obtain the reflection in it of myriads of created forms and structures of the universe." [16] This is referred to in the stanzas VIII-XI (Hearing and Reading) of the *Japuji*. According to Guru Nanak, in the region of knowledge (*gian khand*), ignorance is destroyed and awareness expands and knowledge leads to bliss; knowledge itself is bliss. [17]

The second kind of knowledge is rational knowledge, which is acquired through reason and reflection. The knowledge which one acquires through reason and reflection is a cultivated knowledge. As mentioned above, though based on the sensible facts, it goes beyond the reach of the senses and is able to be aware of the general and the unseen. Guru Nanak does not reject perceptual knowledge totally as some rationalists might have done nor does he consider the perceptual knowledge as the only valid knowledge as

some empiricists have stressed. He considers the empirical knowledge as the first and often complimenting step towards the rational knowledge which has been elaborated in the stanzas of Hearing and Reading (*suniaian*) and reflection (*manne*). Every kind of knowledge has its own area of performance. Both should be combined in such a way that they supplement each other to achieve the still higher knowledge which is called intuitive knowledge. As observed by Kant also, "Concepts without precepts are empty, and precepts without concepts are blind." [18] The data which is acquired through sense perception would be irrelevant and disjointed unless it is unified and integrated by the relations known through reason and reflection.

The third kind of knowledge, along with perceptual and rational knowledge, the Guru has stressed, is intuitive knowledge. The intuitive knowledge is that knowledge which is attained through a superrational and supersensuous faculty. It is mostly related with mysticism. The knowledge acquired through such a faculty is considered related with the higher truths of reality. Intuitive knowledge is above relations, while rational knowledge is about relations. Intuition has been understood very differently by many epistemologists. In the Dictionary of Philosophy, intuition has been defined as, "the direct and immediate apprehension, by a knowing subject of itself, of its conscious states, of other minds, of an external world, of universals, of values, or of rational truths." [19] At another place in *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, it is told "intuitive knowledge is a form of uninferred or immediate knowledge. Two principle philosophical uses of the term may be distinguished: first, uninferred knowledge of the truth of a 'proposition' and second, immediate knowledge of a nonpropositional object. In the latter sense, four kinds of nonpropositional objects have been claimed as intuitable: (a) universal; (b) concepts, as in the case of correctly applying a concept without being able to state its rules of application; (c) sensible objects. . . ." [20]

In the *Upanishads*, it is told, "there is a higher power which enables us to grasp this central spiritual reality. Spiritual things require to be spiritually discerned. . . . Man has the faculty of divine

insight or mystic intuition, by which he transcends the distinctions of intellect and solves the riddles of reason.” [21] As mentioned earlier, Guru Nanak has laid stress upon these three kinds or aspects of knowledge. The one aspect is related with the perceptual knowledge through which man comes to know the physical objects of this universe as sun and moon, etc. God has created man with five sense organs and subtle organs. Man has got the faculty to know. When man reflects and through reflection attains the rational knowledge, he becomes fearless because knowledge destroys the fear. The intuitive knowledge is attained through contemplation which has been explained in *Japuji* in the stanzas of “*ek dhian*.” For intuitive knowledge the Gurus have used the word “*gian anjan*,” and it also refers to a process of knowledge. [22] The seeker can attain the knowledge of the secrets of the Reality if he keeps his mind open and receptive. According to Guru Nanak *gian* (knowledge) is something which is gained, and the gaining or achieving of knowledge is related with perceptual and rational knowledge. The *gian* is also seen as *sojhi hoe*, which refers to intuition. Intuitive knowledge is the highest knowledge which unites the seeker to the highest truth or reality. So according to Sikhism, when the seeker attains all the three kinds of knowledge, his consciousness expands and he knows the whole cosmos. In Sikhism the seeker starts from the lower level of knowing and attains the highest level of consciousness and becomes a *sachiar*, the realized one.

## References

1. Runes DD (1957) Knowledge. In: The dictionary of philosophy. Jaico Publishing House, Bombay
2. Flew A (1979) Knowledge. In: A dictionary of philosophy, 1st edn. Pan Books, London
3. Swami Satprakashananda. Methods of knowledge. George Allen and Unwin, London, p 110
4. Williams MM (1981) Vid. In: A Sanskrit English dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, reprinted
5. Williams MM (1981) Jnana. In: A Sanskrit English dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi. Reprinted
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. diva balai andhera jae, p 791
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. dukhu andhera ghar te mito. guri gianu dirhaio dip balio, p 241
8. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. againu andhera miti geia gur gianu dipaio, p 241
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. gian anjanu bhai bhanjna dekhu niranjan bhae. gupat pargat sabh janiai je manu rakhai thae, p 57
10. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. gian anjanu ja ki netri pirhia ta ko sarab prgasa. agiani andherai sujhsi nahi bahurhi bahrhi bharmata, p 610
11. Russell B (1954) Human knowledge-its scope and aims. George Allen and Unwin, London, fourth impression, p 440
12. Swami Satprakashananda, Methods of knowledge. George Allen and Unwin, London, p 35
13. Montague WP (1958) The ways of knowing. George Allen & Unwin, London, fifth impression, p 186
14. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. asankh jap asankh bhaui. asankh puja asankh tap taau
15. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. dharam khand ka eho dharam. Gian khand ka aakho karam, p 7
16. Sohan Singh (1959) The seeker's path. Orient Longman, Bombay, p 97
17. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. gian khand mahi gianu parchand. tithai naad binod kod anandu, p 7
18. Montague WP (1958) The ways of knowing. George Allen & Unwin, London, fifth impression, p 219
19. Runes DD (1957) Intuition. In: The dictionary of philosophy. Jaico Publishing House, Bombay
20. Flew A (1979) Intuition. In: A dictionary of philosophy, 1st edn. Pan Books, London
21. Swami Satprakashananda Methods of knowledge (1965). George Allen and Unwin, London, pp 194-195
22. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. gian anjanu bhai bhanjana dekhu niranjan bhae. Gupatu prgatu sabh janhiai je manu rakhai thae, p 57

## Law and Justice (Sikhism)

Manjit Singh Gill  
No5 Chambers, London, UK

### Definition

Principles of justice and law shaped by *gurbani*, or hymns of the Sikh Gurus, which are meant to mould and direct one's actions.

### Spirit of Justice

Sikhism is a religion which aims to inspire the individual to achieve purity of thought and action and to attain union with God. Like most religions it speaks approvingly of some actions and disapprovingly of others. But, whilst it has much to say of value for systems of law and justice, it does not itself directly prescribe a system of law and justice or lay down a defined set of legal rules. Nevertheless, there are very clear and identifiable Sikh principles of justice around which a coherent system of law and justice could be built. These principles have shaped the *bani* and actions of the Sikh Gurus. The Gurus resolved personal disputes between those who came before them by reference to these principles, there being no specific Sikh courts as such. [11, 12, 14, 15, 18] Whilst formal legal and administrative systems in Punjab have remained essentially based on Hindu

traditions as modified by Mughal influence during the time of Mughal rule, and more recently by Western, more specifically English, systems of law and justice, Sikh principles have deeply affected the social systems and structures of the Punjab and of Sikhs generally. [4–6]

### Key Principles

Over the course of their history Sikhs developed an evolving and changing set of principles to administer justice and guide their actions in everyday interactions. This tradition continues to evolve and develop in consideration of contemporary issues facing the Sikh community. [1, 3] The key Sikh principles which are of particular relevance to systems of law and justice include the following: [6, 10, 11, 15, 18, 19]

*Universality:* Sikhs recognize that all human beings are of the same race and that any system of law and justice must therefore cater for people for all creeds and backgrounds.

*Unity:* Sikhism conceives of the individual and God as one. There is an absence of the dualist approach found in the West in which Church and State are opposed. Instead, there is an emphasis on treating what in Western thought is regarded as the religious and the secular as being integral corollaries of each other.

*Pluralism:* The principles of liberal tolerance and diversity, which have only recently in modern

times begun to be applied in Western systems (and then largely as a reaction to the oppression of religious institutions), have been firmly established in Sikhism from the outset without any conflict between the religious and the secular. The most obvious example of these principles is that Sikhism proclaims the right of all religions to exist. This was given practical expression in the willingness of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, to be martyred in 1675 for protesting the right of Hindus to be Hindus and against forcible conversion to Islam. Sikhism is perhaps the only religion which proclaims the equal right of all other religions to coexist. Mention may also be made here that the *Harimandir Sahib* (the Golden Temple) at Amritsar has four doors, signifying a welcome to all. [9] These Sikh principles imply a legal system in which all religions and creeds, including the secular, are equally free to express themselves. This is a principle which is not practised in many modern Western and middle-Eastern legal systems.

*Equality:* The principle of equality occupies a primary, indeed one may say a governing, position in Sikhism. It is particularly important in the context of gender, race, religion, and disability. For example, the mandatory wearing of the facial veil, an Islamic influence on India, was directly challenged by Guru Nanak, as was the idea that women are unclean. Sikhs have no ordained clergy as such. Anyone with the relevant knowledge, male or female, may perform tasks which are reserved in other religions for those in priestly orders. Women are fully entitled to deliver and to take part in all religious functions on an equal basis. They have always had the right to participate in political processes and to hold political office on an equal basis. By contrast, it is only in modern times that the West has practised universal suffrage. Distinction on the grounds of disability and social status, so often a basis for discriminatory treatment in Indian society, is firmly rejected in Sikhism.

*Individual dignity and the Community:* Sikhism fully recognizes the dignity and autonomy of the individual, a principle which is the foundation stone of the modern Universal Declaration

of Human Rights. In Sikhism, this principle is consistent with its pluralistic traditions. However, respect for the individual goes hand in hand with respect for the community at large. For example, through the concept of *sharing*, even the weakest members of society are assisted through the financial contributions of others, implying a system of law and justice in which safety nets exist for the weakest. The institution of *langar*, or a communal kitchen, is intended to ensure no one need go hungry. The concept of *daswandh*, or contributing one-tenth of one's earnings to the community, fulfills a similar purpose. These practices imply a system of social justice from which specific laws of redistribution of wealth may be derived. Diversity of viewpoints is not only permitted, but expected. There is also a great emphasis on reaching solutions through mediation rather than adjudication, so that decisions are made as much through consensus as possible rather than confrontation. This idea seems to be gaining greater prominence in many modern legal systems which are now actively encouraging systems of mediation (largely because it is cheaper and faster) in place of traditional confrontational systems of adjudication and dispute resolution.

*Humane punishment:* Sikhism does not conceive of God as vengeful. It does not adopt a vengeful attitude to infractions of moral codes or codes of behavior. Thus, it does not adopt the biblical idea of an eye for an eye. It is rarely concerned with retributive justice. On the contrary, punishment in Sikh practice for infractions of a moral code aims to be proportionate and rehabilitative so as to ensure that the individual is placed on the right path. This attitude carries through into the laws of war. In keeping with the position of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Sikhs only resort to force when all other means of righting a wrong have failed. Sikhism emphasizes a humane response for the treatment of the enemy wounded who are *hors de combat* and of enemy prisoners. This attitude follows from the view that the human race is one and that God resides in all.

## Sovereign Code of Conduct and Modern Fiduciary Challenges

During the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ruled Punjab from 1801 to 1839, the Sikhs had a stable and powerful State of their own, but there was still no separate system of courts. Nevertheless, it seems that Sikh principles of justice influenced the practices of the political administration. For example, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians as well as Sikhs were allowed to hold significant posts in the administration. The Maharaja remained a subject to the authority of the *Akal Takht* and accepted the punishment imposed by the *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht* for moral lapses. This is consistent with the idea that no one, not even a supreme political sovereign, is in any way above the rule of the law. Consistently, with the Sikh approach to punishment, there was no imposition of the death penalty during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time; punishments were being generally awarded in fines and the severest kind of punishment being excommunication. [6, 7, 13]

Sikhism has its own code of conduct known as the *rahit*. Over time there have been several *rahit*. However, it is the modern *rahit maryada*, the product of scholarly study carried out from 1927 to the mid-1940s under the aegis of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee*, a body concerned with the management of Sikh shrines, which has commanded universal acceptance amongst Sikhs. The code contains a number of principles concerned with moral and religious behavior and certainly does not purport to be a system of law or justice. [16]

Sikhs have spread into many areas of the world where they face challenges in the maintenance of their identity as Sikhs. Their presence has in several instances required the host systems of law and justice to re-examine themselves and to attempt to make accommodations. Such difficulties would not arise under Sikh concepts of law and justice; but clearly they do under many Western and middle-Eastern legal systems. In a Sikh system of law and justice, the need for tolerance, inclusivity, pluralism, and a respect for the autonomy of the individual would not permit the sort of interference with manifestation of religious identity that exists in such

legal systems. However, under Western legal systems, Sikhs have waged long campaigns to be allowed to wear turbans instead of helmets when riding motor cycles, and to wear turbans in various work-related environments and in public contexts or whilst holding public posts. These struggles have had varying levels of success depending on the issue and the country involved. [1–3, 8, 15, 17] In a number of host states objections have been raised such as the greater cost of treating of victims of accidents who do not wear helmets, the need to balance safety or security considerations, and the need to ensure that the state remains secular, that the state does not allow religion to be manifested in public educational institutions and that it does not favor any particular religion. The struggles over these and other such issues have led Sikhs to examine their own philosophical approach to law and justice and have exposed the limits of the provision in Western legal systems for true diversity.

## Cross-References

- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Takhts](#)

## References

1. Angelo M (1997) The Sikh diaspora: tradition and change in an immigrant community. Garland Publishers, New York
2. Chopra R (2011) Militant and migrant: the politics and social history of Punjab. Routledge, New York
3. Dusenbery VA (2008) Sikhs at large: religion, culture, and politics in global perspective. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. Gandhi SS (1999) Sikhs in the eighteenth century. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
5. Grewal JS (1990) The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
6. Grewal JS (2007) Sikh ideology polity, and social order: from Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Manohar, New Delhi
7. Grewal JS, Banga I (1980) Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his times. Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar
8. Hawley M (2013) Sikh diaspora: theory, agency, and experience. Brill, Leiden



9. Kaur M (1983) The golden temple, past and present. Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar
10. Kaur G (1998) The Sikh perspective of human values. Punjabi University Press, Patiala
11. Kohli SS (1966) Outlines of Sikh thought. Punjabi Prakashak, New Delhi
12. Kohli SS (1975) Sikh ethics. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi
13. Lafont J-M (2002) Maharaja Ranjit Singh: lord of the five rivers. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
14. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
15. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
16. McLeod WH (2003) The Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
17. Nayar KE (2004) The Sikh diaspora in Vancouver: three generations amid tradition, modernity, and multiculturalism. University of Toronto Press, Toronto
18. Singh J (1990) A few Sikh doctrines reconsidered. National Book Shop, Delhi
19. Singh N-GK (2011) Sikhism: an introduction. I.B. Tauris, London

---

## Legal Orders

- [Hukumnama](#)

---

## Legitimacy

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Licentiousness

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Linkage

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Logic (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

## Synonyms

[Antithesis](#); [Argumentation](#); [Coherence](#); [Connection](#); [Deduction](#); [Dialectic](#); [Induction](#); [Inference](#); [Intellection](#); [Linkage](#); [Philosophy](#); [Ratiocination](#); [Rationale](#); [Reason](#); [Reasoning](#); [Relationship](#); [Sanity](#); [Sense](#); [Syllogism](#); [Synthesis](#); [Thesis](#)

According to *Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, logic is as follows: (1) (a) a science that deals with the principles and criteria of validity of inference and demonstration (the science of the formal principles of reasoning); (b) a branch or variety of logic; (c) a branch of semiotics; (d) the formal principles of a branch of knowledge; (2) (a) a particular mode of reasoning viewed as valid or faulty; (b) relevance, propriety; (3) interrelation or sequence of facts or events when seen as inevitable or predictable; (4) the arrangement of circuit elements (as in a computer) needed for computation; also, the circuits themselves; and (5) something that forces a decision apart from or in opposition to reason (the thought processes that have been established as leading to valid solutions to problems).

In Indian philosophy, as in Western philosophy, logic, or *tarka vidya*, is considered very important. In six Indian systems of philosophy, Gautama's *nyaya darshan* is considered the system of logic. "The term *nyaya* is defined as the means by which the mind is led to a conclusion. The word *nyaya* becomes equivalent to an argument, and the system which treats arguments more thoroughly than others came to be known as the *nyaya* system. In popular usage, the term *nyaya* means "right" or "just," so the *nyaya* system becomes the science of right reasoning. *Nyaya* in the narrow sense stands for syllogistic reasoning,

while in the wider sense it signifies the examination of objects by evidence". [1]

This brief introduction of the *nyaya* system has been given just to highlight the fact that logic, or *tarka vidya*, is well known to the Indian systems of philosophy. Although the word *tarka vidya* is not often mentioned directly, both inductive and deductive reasoning have been used frequently for critical evaluation of prevalent philosophical and religious notions, traditions, customs and concepts, as well as the broader social system. Sikhism allows for analysis through philosophical criticism of basic concepts – such as renunciation (*sanyas*), goodness (*neki*), and knowledge (*gyan*) – of different religious thoughts prevalent in India at that time. In this process of dialogical analysis in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, a question is posed and then an answer is given.

For instance, the question of ritual bathing as the source of emancipation is raised in a dialogue. In response, the questioner is told to worship the one sole God and that the true ritual bath lies in the service of the true Guru. If a person bathes at holy spots with his mind full of impurity, he does not find entry into heaven. The shabad makes the analogy that if one could achieve a supreme state by dipping himself in water, then frogs, because they are ever bathing in water, would not be born again and again. Similarly, in some Indian traditions, it is believed that death of a person at sacred places like Banaras leads one to heaven. This belief is questioned in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, where it is asserted instead that "a person's deeds lead him to heaven or to hell; for instance, a hard-hearted person cannot achieve heaven, even if he dies in Banaras, whereas a person devoted to God will bring liberation to all his tribe, even if he dies at place like Haramba, which is considered a cursed place". [2]

The rituals related with the practice of yoga as the means of liberation are also questioned in the same manner. Yoga means "liberation," or union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. There are some followers of cults within the broader yoga system that believe in wandering nude. In the *Guru Granth Sahib*, it is argued that if a being can attain liberation by wandering about nude, then all animals of the forest would be liberated; going nude does not help one

contemplate the universal, pervasive self. Similarly, the claim that one can achieve yogic accomplishment by shaving his head is questioned by analogically questioning why sheep do not attain liberation.

In the same way, the priest's claim of being high caste due to his birth is questioned. Such a claim negates what is natural and true in human beings because all beings have been created from the divine essence, and caste does not exist in the womb. In the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Bhagat Kabir asks rhetorically "how Brahmins could have originated; if all human beings are born in the same manner, he asks, how can one be low and another high? In order to be a special class, one has to choose to be born in a different manner", and because this is impossible, birth is denied as a criterion to differentiate between high and low caste. To drive his point home, Bhagat Kabir further asks "whether the Brahmin has milk in his veins instead of blood. This *shabad* teaches instead that only the person who contemplates the Lord is in a position to be called Brahmin among men of God". [3]

As discussed earlier, logic is applied in Sikh philosophy to judge rational and irrational beliefs. Rational knowledge is the awareness of forms and relations, as well as the awareness of logical relations such as that of cause and effect. It is rational to infer the effects from the cause, but it is irrational to look for an effect without sufficient and proper cause. Cause can be defined as an unopposed tendency to produce an event, i.e., every cause is followed by its effect at all times. In Indian philosophy, especially in the *nyaya* system of logic, there is "nothing in the cause other than unconditional invariable compliments of operative conditions (*karana-samagri*), and nothing in the effect other than the consequent phenomenon which results from the joint operations of the antecedent conditions. Such general conditions such as relative space (*dik*), time (*kala*), the will of Ishvara, and destiny (*adrasta*) are regarded as the common causes of all effects (*karyatva-prayojaka*). These are called *sadharana karana*. [4] Furthermore, the causal relation according to *nyaya* system, "like the relation of genus to species, is a natural relation of concomitance, which can be ascertained only by

the uniform and uninterrupted experience of agreement in presence and agreement in absence, and not by a deduction from a certain a-priori principle like that of causality or identity of essence". [5] In Western logic, the cause has been defined as a relation between the totality of conditions and the phenomena that they produce through their combination.

The Sikh Gurus use the method of proving propositions by appealing to abstract and universal principles such as the relation between cause and effect. According to them, the cause necessarily leads to its effect or consequences. For example, according to the Gurus, it is rational to hold that as one sows so one reaps, while it is illogical to look for an effect without sufficient and proper cause.

Guru Nanak says that "whatever one sows so shall he reap; a person eats only that what he earns". [6] In other words, "good leads to heaven and evil to hell. Scriptures praise enlightenment as supreme because by it is attained the holy name, and the holy name is the truth. By sowing truth, the truth grows, and the self finds a place at the divine portal". [7] As mentioned earlier, the cause is defined as a relation between a totality of conditions and the phenomena which in their combination they produce. Guru Nanak has indicated this by saying that "those who sowed the whole seed reaped honor, whereas if a broken seed is sown, how it shall sprout?" For the seed to sprout, there are certain conditions which must be fulfilled. According to the Guru, "first the seed should be in whole, not broken one. Secondly, the season must be favorable. Only then the seed will sprout". [8] The Guru further says that "it is illogical to sow something and to expect the fruit of an opposite nature. For example, if a man sows poison and expects to reap nectar, it is not justified. Similarly, whatever a man has in mind becomes manifest, but if he has one thing in mind and speaks another, then whatever he says is useless". [9] Baba Farid elaborates the same thought when he says that "it is illogical on the part of a peasant who, having planted *kikar* (a thorny tree), expects to pluck grapes from the tree. Similarly one who has spent his whole life in spinning wool has no justification in his expectation that he will wear silk because of his work". [10]

So, if operative conditions are not fulfilled, then it is illogical to seek an effect. It can be concluded that logic has been used in Sikhism to reject the irrational beliefs.

## References

1. Radhakrishnan S (1929) Indian philosophy, vol 2, 2nd edn. Blackie & Son Pvt, Bombay, p. 43
2. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 484
3. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 324
4. Dasgupta SN (1975) A history of Indian philosophy, vol 1. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, p. 322
5. Ibid. p. 322
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 730
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1243
8. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 468
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 474
10. Sri Guru Grant Sahib, p. 1379

---

## Love

► [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Love (Sikhism)

Harpreet Singh

Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

## Definition

Love refers to a state of intense longing for the Beloved and is used to demarcate a path of requisite self-sacrifice. In Sikh teaching, "love" is a single unifying force; its manifestations are many. Love is a state of mind that brings radical change, making one free of physical, biological, and psychological determinisms. Through love, believers gradually extricate themselves from the social conditioning of class, tradition, and culture and from prejudices that prevent them from seeing the essence of God in all creation. Vitalized by the essential light of the Gurū, love becomes an

instrument in forming a more extensive human community that is passionate about helping others reach the vision of God. With the teaching of the Gurū, through love, human beings are transformed, becoming God-like, perfecting themselves and the creation around them.

## The Truth of Love

“I speak the truth, so hear ye all! Only those who love shall find God.” Gurū Gobind Singh in the *Akāl Ustat* (9.29)

Love in *Sikhī* begins with an intense longing for the Beloved and finds concrete expression in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, which uses a rich vocabulary found in Panjābī, Hindavī, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic languages to describe this phenomenon. Over a dozen terms such as *prem*, *prīt*, *bhakti*, *ishq*, *muhabat*, *saneh*, *cau*, *bhau*, *piār*, and *neh* are used, often synonymously, to describe different dimensions of love. Gurū Nānak exhorts the human mind to love God, like the pied-cuckoo (*cātrik*) who yearns night and day for the rain-drop with his mouth facing the sky. “The pools are brimming with water, and the land is luxuriantly green, but what are they to him, if that single drop of rain does not fall into his mouth?”. [3]

The path of love, however, requires self-sacrifice. With a state of mind characterized by tremendous humility and courage the Sikh is expected to answer the call of the Gurū Nānak demanding, “If you desire to play the game of love with me, step on to my path with your head on your palm. Once you enter this path of love, be prepared to give up everything, for there is no turning back”. [3] Accordingly, love for the Gurū can only be unconditional and utterly selfless. This Sikh prepares herself to sacrifice everything for God, the Beloved, whose essence manifests itself in the core of one’s very being. [1, 10]

As love for the Beloved begins to blossom, it is natural for the lover to experience *birahā*, the pangs of separation. Shaikh Farīd (d. 1265), a *Chishtī Sufī* whose hymns are included in the Sikh scripture, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, goes to the extent of saying that “the body in which *birahā*

does not well up is nothing but a dead corpse”. [3] Love may give rise to desire or yearning for the Beloved, but these are consequences of love and not love itself. Desire and yearning fade away when their goal or object is attained, but love does not die. In another hymn, Shaikh Farīd avers that only those individuals who have cultivated love for the Beloved in their hearts are truly human; the rest are “half-baked,” immature beings who are a burden for this earth. [3] Love is seen as an instrument of change that takes the Sikh toward a state of perfection. It enables the Sikh to attain essential qualities that are intrinsic to the nature of God: truthfulness (*sat*), fearlessness (*nirbhau*), and lack of enmity (*nirvair*). [5, 6, 8]

The ability to love is dependent on God’s grace and a willingness to change. It requires complete surrender of the self to God’s will, of which the dissolution of one’s ego (*haumai*) is a byproduct. For love to take root, however, one’s social and economic conditions need to be conducive to this evolution. [2, 8] Basic needs must be met before love can begin its transformative process: “O God, devotion is not possible with an empty stomach”. [3] In addition to economical stability, a state of political autonomy is also considered essential. In fact, death is preferable to a life of subjugation. [3] Furthermore, Sikh Gurūs repudiate stratification of society through social orders such as the caste-system. [4, 11] To make human beings self-sufficient, Gurū Nānak ordains that they earn their bread through hard-work (*kirat*) and never live on the charity of others. The fruits obtained by the sweat of one’s brow are to be shared with others (*vanḍ chakṇā*) and not accumulated. In addition, the Sikh is expected to play an active role in the political and social processes to reform existing institutions and create new ones in order to establish a free and just social order. [1, 7]

In order to personalize God so that an intimate relationship with the Beloved may become possible, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* employs a leitmotif in which God is represented as the bridegroom and the human soul as the bride. [3] Many hymns in the Sikh scripture describe the ascent of the human soul as it journeys to meet the Beloved. This ascent is best described in Gurū Rāmdās’ composition that is used to solemnize the Sikh

nuptials, the *lāvān*. The composition outlines four overlapping psychological stages that lead to a full realization of God. The first stage signifies commitment to the Gurū in one's daily actions. In the second stage, the aspirant achieves fearlessness and dissolution of one's ego to come a step closer to self-realization. During the third stage, the aspirant begins to experience an intense yearning to meet God. A pain of separation leads to an intimate relationship with *saṅgat* (congregation) that has the same goals. In the final stage, self-realization occurs, leading to bliss.

Gurū Amardās (1479–1574), the third Gurū, asserts, “They should not be considered husband and wife, who merely sit together. Rather they alone are husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies”. [3] Having overcome their self-centeredness through love, the husband and wife assist one another in their collective journey toward self-realization. Their sexual passions are honed into loving intimacy. Sikhī forbids unbridled indulgence in sex: “No one has ever achieved calmness of passions through unbridled indulgence in passions. [9] Can a blazing fire ever be quenched by adding more fuel to it? The abiding peace that knows no ending is nearness to and communion with God”. [3] According to Gurū Nānak, when human beings, turning their backs on God, seek fulfillment in sensuality, they reap the harvest of distemper and disease. [3] Human love must find its culmination and ultimate goal in a community of solidarity and love with and in God. [2, 6]

God's love operates within the institution of *saṅgat*, the congregation of the seekers of truth, which plays an essential role in a Sikh's journey toward self-realization. The *saṅgat* cooperates with the divine will (*hukam*) and facilitates the moving of an individual's essence from ideal to reality. The *saṅgat*'s love is not a calculative will to improve, but rather an act that progressively illumines that ideal value essence of a being and then affirms that being in realizing its full potential. This affirmation of the *saṅgat* takes place through participation in the Sikh ideals of *sevā* and *simran* – unconditional service of God's creation and remembrance of

God, respectively. *Sevā* is a compassionate heart's active engagement with God's creation. When the Sikh selflessly serves God by loving its creation, God reciprocates intensely and showers the Sikh with its merciful love. The Sikh travels across a continuum, from being a *manmukh* (self-centered) to being a *gurmukh* (Gurū-oriented), as she understands that God – because of its love for the world – resides within creation. God's love enables the *gurmukh* to form a special relationship with the disenfranchised, preferring to serve the lowly over the rich and powerful. [3]

## Cross-References

- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Marriage \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Samskara](#)

## References

1. Cole WO (1982) *The Guru in Sikhism*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London
2. Gurdās B (n.d.) *Kabit*: n.p.
3. Gurū Granth Sāhib (n.d.) *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee*, Amritsar
4. Kohli SS (ed) (2003) *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib*, 1st edn, 3 vols, vol 1. The Sikh National Heritage Trust, Birmingham
5. Mahboob HS (2000) *Sehije Racio Khālsā*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar (in the Panjābi language)
6. Nand Lal B, Bedi BPL (1969) *The Pilgrim's way: Diwan of Bhai Nand Lal Goya*. Punjabi University, Patiala
7. Singh K (1991) *Guru Nanak's life and thought*, 1st edn. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
8. Singh P (1993) *Spirit of the Sikh*, 2 vols, vol 2, part 2. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (1995) *Sex and Sikhism*. In: *Some insights into Sikhism*. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
10. Singh K (1995) *Sikhs and communism*. In: *Some Insights into Sikhism*. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
11. Singh K (2001) *Pārāśarapraśna: the Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh*, 3rd edn. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar



---

# M

---

## Mahant

- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)

---

## Maharaja Dalip Singh

- [Dalip Singh, Maharaja](#)

---

## Maharajah Ranjit Singh

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Man

- [Mind \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Mantra

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Marriage (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

The name given to the Sikh marriage ceremony is *Anand Karaj* (lit. the making of blissful relationship). The origins of the *Anand Karaj* can be traced back to the time of Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru (1479–1574) who composed the beautiful hymn *Anandu* in the measure of Ramkali Raga. Although *Anandu* could be sung or recited on any religious occasion, the third Guru's successor and son-in-law, Guru Ram Das, composed a new hymn of four stanzas called *Lavan* (lit. circumbulation) which was meant to be sung or recited for the purpose of solemnizing the marriage of a Sikh couple.

Ironically, the Anand Karaj appears to have fallen out of use during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh most likely due to the prevalence Brahmanic influence at the court of the Sikh ruler. However, the Anand marriage ceremony was brought back into use by the Nirankari reformers during the mid-nineteenth century and adopted by the Singh Sabha reform movement in the late nineteenth century. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was a vigorous debate between the Lahore and Amritsar factions

of the Singh Sabha movement. At that time, the *Anand Karaj* did not have legal sanction as an official marriage ceremony of the Sikhs. It was a period when political Hinduism was in an ascendant phase and as a result, Hindu reformist groups such as the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam Sabhas were becoming increasingly vocal in their quest to absorb Sikhs into the Hindu fold, arguing that Sikhs should conduct their marriage ceremony according to the ancient Vedic fire ceremony. The Lahore faction represented Tat Khalsa ideals and wanted to reinstitute the form of marriage ceremony traceable to the early Sikh Gurus, in which the marriage was solemnized by circumambulation of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred Sikh text. In addition to the writings of the Sikh Gurus, the Tat Khalsa faction were able to rely on the Prem Sumarag, an eighteenth-century text that dealt with Sikh social code. The dispute was eventually settled in favor of the Tat Khalsa when the Punjab Government passed the Anand Marriage Act in 1909, thereby giving state recognition to the original Sikh marriage ceremony. By the mid-twentieth century, the *Anand Karaj* was formally codified and a special place was secured for it in the modern Sikh code of conduct, or *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (1954) as a result of which it is now universally recognized and conducted by all Sikhs.

The Sikh wedding is unique in a number of ways. It requires only the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, someone (of either sex) to read the required hymns, and the bride and bridegroom to walk around the Guru Granth four times. It requires no services to be performed by a priest and does not even have to take place in a gurdwara. It can be performed in a home or any appropriate public space such as a community hall.

Marriage remains one of the most joyous social events for any Sikh family. Celebrations take place over several days, and it can be one of the most memorable days in a Sikh's life. Although *Anand Karaj* comprises the most important part of the marriage itself, binding the couple into a spiritual unity, the celebratory aspect of the marriage is still embedded in the broader Punjabi culture and tradition. Having said that, marriage continues to be a relatively conservative

institution with most marriages are still being arranged or assisted by parents and close relatives. At the very least, even with the large increase in Internet matrimonial sites, young Sikhs are expected to gain parental consent and approval for their choice of partner, who should ideally be a Sikh, although marriages between Sikhs and non-Sikhs are not uncommon these days.

Traditionally, the first step in the making of a marriage is for the parents of the daughter or son to ask a trusted relative or friend (called a *vichola* or intermediary) to find a suitable spouse for their child. The *vichola* works discretely making inquiries amongst known families and will try to match the profiles of the prospective partners and their families. When a suitable candidate is found, the *vichola* arranges a meeting of the two families so that the prospective partners and their families can meet each other. If the two parties are not satisfied, the *vichola* will begin another search. In the last two or three decades, it has become increasingly common for prospective families to meet directly through matrimonial columns in Punjabi newspapers, or more recently, through Sikh and Punjabi Internet sites. But even with these new tools, many families have continued to use a *vichola* to help make the first approaches.

If the prospective partners and families agree, then preparations for a marriage can begin, the first step being the fixing of a wedding date. Typically, there are several steps that lead up to the wedding day. These main ones are as follows, although it should be noted that some of these are actually Punjabi cultural in origin rather than strictly Sikh: (i) an engagement (*kurmai* or *thaka*); (ii) prenuptial ceremonies including an *akhand path*, *shagan*, *sangeet*, *mehndhi*, and *choora*; (iii) the wedding procession which includes *sehra bandhi*, reception of the *baraat* and the *milni*; (iv) the marriage ceremony itself or *Anand Karaj*, followed by a *doli*; (v) the reception.

For the engagement (*kurmai*), the families assemble either at the groom's residence or at a gurdwara. To seal the engagement, an *ardas* will be offered and the girl's parents will offer to the prospective husband an iron bracelet (*kara*), a *kirpan*, and Punjabi sweets (*mithai*). In addition, many Sikhs also exchange rings at this stage

although this is not essential. On the day of the wedding, the bridegroom arrives at the gurdwara accompanied by the *baraat* or wedding party comprised of relatives, friends, and invited guests. The *baraat* is formally received by the bride's family and relatives in a greeting ceremony called *milni*. After the *milni* an *ardas* will be offered, and both parties partake of breakfast before proceeding to the wedding ceremony or *Anand Karaj*.

For the *Anand Karaj*, the congregation assembles in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. As *kirtan* is performed by a *ragi jatha*, the groom will be seated first and waits for his prospective bride to join him on his left in front of the Guru Granth. The *granthi* conducting the ceremony will ask the couple and the *sangat* to arise for *ardas*, after which the couple will receive instruction on the Guru's teaching about the institution of marriage and its importance. After they assent to this instruction, they will then be seated and the bride's father or other senior relative will place one end of a scarf (*palla*) in the bride's hand and place the other end in the groom's hand. This is an emotional ceremony signifying that the father has given his daughter away to her prospective husband, and the formation of a new bond between husband and wife. The *granthi* will then read the first four stanzas comprising Guru Ram Das' *lavan* hymn, sung in *raga Suhi* by the *kitani jatha*. As the singing of the hymn begins, the couple will arise and walk slowly and solemnly around the Guru Granth Sahib, with the bride following the groom, aiming to complete one circuit in the time that it takes to sing one stanza. The process is repeated three times, so that the couple will have made four clockwise transits around the Guru Granth Sahib. By prostrating themselves in front of the Guru, the couple signal their binding to each other through the Word of scripture. The ceremony will conclude with a singing of Guru Amardas' hymn *Anand Sahib* and the distribution of *karah parshad*.

After a wedding banquet which can be elaborate or as simple as a gurdwara *langar*, the bride and groom depart for a reception either at the bride's house or at a marriage hall where the two families and guests celebrate the occasion with traditional Punjabi music and dance. Once the

banquet is over, the bride is taken back to her home from where she will formally depart from her parents' home. This leave taking is called *doli* which refers to the wooden sedan-like structure in which the bride was escorted in bygone days (this is now replaced by an adorned car). The *doli* is a tearful occasion as the bride takes leave of her parents and gets back into the car which will take her and her husband to her new home.

## Further Reading

1. Anand Karaj. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala, pp 120–126
2. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury Publishing, London
3. McLeod WH (1998) Sikhism. Penguin, London

## Martyrdom (Sikhism)

Navdeep Mandair

Independent Scholar, Coventry, UK

Department of Theology and Religious Studies,  
University of Birmingham, Edgbaston,  
Birmingham, UK

## Synonyms

Jivan-mukti; Shahadat; Shaheed; Shahidi

## Definition

Martyrdom, *shahadi*, is a sacrificial death for a socially just cause. It is grounded in the Philosophy of Oneness taught and actualized by the Sikh Gurus and is an outgrowth of the *sant-sipahi* (saint-soldier) ideal as well as the notion of *miri-piri* (the obligation to act politically and justly as an aspect of religious practice.)

## The Martyrs Death: Cause Worth Dying for

In Sikhism martyrdom (*shahadat*, *shahidi*) is a key theme in the narrative of self-definition,

this affirmation of faith even at the risk of death demonstrating the most profound intuition of righteousness (*dharam*). The importance of the martyr (*shahid*) in Sikh tradition is vividly attested by its prominence in the public discourse of Sikhism. *Gurdwara* spaces are commonly invested with “massacre art”, [5] the macabre iconography of Sikhs slaughtered for their faith; this morbid tone is echoed in the prevalence of sacrifice as a theme in the repertoire of religious balladeers (*dhadis*) and preachers (*parcharaks*). Most significantly this commemoration of martyrs has become institutionalized within the litany of the communal prayer called *Ardas*.

Martyrdom, like militancy and gender, has become a disputed category in a debate between the Western academy and its internalist critics over the “proper” representation of Sikhism. Talib presents a succinct account of how martyrdom is understood in Sikh tradition. He characterizes it as voluntarily submitting to death for the Sikh faith, an act which provides a model of piety for the whole community. [10] This sacrifice is framed within a politics of resistance to oppressive regimes, so that dying in battle against Mughal tyranny (e.g., *Chamkaur* and *Muksar* in 1705) is transparently identifiable with those deaths arising from non-violent confrontations with British imperialism (e.g., the *Gurdwara Reform Movement* from 1920 to 1925). This leads to the idea that a consistent idiom of martyrdom is discernible across the entire span of Sikh history, such that Guru Nanak’s eulogization of self-sacrifice (in *slok varan teh vadhik*) can be traced on the bloody bodies of martyrs from Guru Arjan (1606) to Sant Bhindranwale (1984).

This view of martyrdom as an ideal consistently rehearsed across Sikh history has been problematized by the historian of Sikh religion W.H. McLeod. McLeod’s observations regarding the death of Guru Arjan drew attention to a discrepancy between contemporaneous accounts of this event which located it within a context of judicial process and its appropriation by later Sikh tradition as an act of martyrdom. [6] This claim buttressed his view that actors other than the Gurus had a role in shaping the Sikh community and insinuates that eliding these

external influences served an *ideological* purpose in subsequent Sikh tradition.

Lou Fenech’s work has been seminal in interrogating how the idiom of martyrdom has been used to mobilize this ideological drift within Sikhism. Fenech supports McLeod’s view of Guru Arjan’s death. In his analysis of one of the key sources for this event, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Jahangir’s memoirs), Fenech claims that the emperor’s concern about the aggrandisement of the early Sikh Gurus remained muted until Guru Arjan’s treasonable conduct in blessing his rebellious son Khusrau Mizra. Since it was an act of sedition and not religious affiliation which drew Jahangir’s punitive response Guru Arjan’s death could not be considered commensurate with martyrdom. [2–4] Pashaura Singh attempts to recuperate the traditional view of Guru Arjan as a martyr by situating his death within the context of Chingissid judicial custom. Singh identifies the Guru’s punishment (*yasa*) with the punitive measures reserved for honored figures (*tora*), which were implemented without shedding blood. He argues that since Guru Arjan is recorded in the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* as having died through torture (*azar*) the state recognized his eminent status; and since this standing was based on his veneration as a religious figure his death therefore constituted martyrdom. [9] Fenech marginalizes Singh’s argument by contesting the view that Guru Arjan was a privileged figure in the Mughal imaginary. He draws attention to Jahangir’s disdain for Guru Arjan’s religious credentials, his charlatanry exposed by his seditious conduct. Fenech argues confirms his view that the fifth Guru was a victim of a suspicious state rather than a martyr. [4]

Fenech notes that Sikh sources do not identify Guru Arjan as a martyr until the mid-eighteenth century and that this characterization of his death arises within a novel statement of Sikh identity which valorises heroic self-sacrifice. This trend emerges within the *gur-bilas* literature of the eighteenth century, a cluster of Sikh hagiographies which eulogize the battles of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. This literature developed in a context of armed resistance to Mughal and Afghan oppression; not surprisingly these texts

identified martial prowess and sacrificial zeal as the exemplary virtues of the Sikhs, and as such were panegyrics to what Fenech calls ‘athletes of piety’. Curiously, these eighteenth century texts scrupulously avoided using *shahidi* as a term for martyrdom; although this word faithfully communicated the idea of heroic self-sacrifice its usefulness was limited by its Islamic colouring. [2–4]

Fenech points out that the word *shahid* only gained purchase in Sikh literature during the early nineteenth century. He argues that the naturalization of this term by Sikh writers was emblematic of a new self-assurance within Sikh society and, more contentiously, that it marked a shift in the way Sikhs imagined their tradition. Fenech claims that the *shahid* had long been a presence in Punjabi folk religion and that its figuration as a martyr was simply one aspect of a more heterogeneous identity. He draws attention to the plural nature of the *shahid* by highlighting its role as a spiritual being in the discourse of folk polytheism to which petitions could be addressed for blessings (*barakat*). Fenech suggests that the accommodation of the word *shahid* in Sikh literature marked the emergence of a new (*Sanatan*) orthodoxy comfortable with the “pluralistic” *doxa* invoked by this term. [2–4]

Taking his cue from Oberoi. [8] Fenech notes how, in late nineteenth century colonial Punjab, the term *shahid* became a contested front in a struggle between *Sanatan* Sikhs and the *Tat Khalsa* over the limits of orthodox belief. Although both parties were concerned to restore an allegedly lapsed sense of religious commitment among the Sikhs they disagreed profoundly about the terms of this reform. While *Sanatan* Sikhs represented reform as a *prop* for the traditional provisions of Sikh culture the *Tat Khalsa* saw it as a return to a *proper* understanding of Sikhism. Fenech echoes the consensus in Sikh Studies which views the reformist agenda of the *Tat Khalsa* as profoundly exposed to the *ideological* invigilation of colonialism. He argues that the martyrologies innovated by the *Tat Khalsa* were emblematic of this colonization of the Sikh voice. [2–4] These accounts inscribed a shift from the martyrolatrous view of shahids to a narrative unencumbered by the relics of Indic belief and thus commensurate with the progressive logic of

the Sikh religion. However, since this characterization of Sikhism was a corollary of its encounter with colonial norms, the reform invited by the *Tat Khalsa*’s “rhetoric of martyrdom” was fundamentally an act of revision.

Lou Fenech’s analysis of martyrdom is part of a dominant critique in Sikh Studies which views the *Tat Khalsa* as agents of a cultural grand narrative, whose standardization of the Sikh story came at the cost of its catholicity. One of the key shibboleths of this critical narrative is that its historical approach is disinterested, allowing sources to be interrogated without prejudice. Observations about the reification of Sikh identity in late colonial Punjab seem to be straightforward historical reportage; however, by *distinguishing* between an originally plural *doxa*- and neo-Sikh orthodoxy the awkwardness of this claim becomes apparent. The neutrality of this account conceals a normative statement about religion in which “pluralism” arbitrates the worth of particular perspectives. In this light, Fenech’s critique connives in devaluing the “homogenizing” idiom of the *Tat Khalsa*. This censure of the *Tat Khalsa* echoes a key prejudice in Religious Studies against politicized religions, stigmatizing as improper those traditions which seek to contest the political with secular modernity. Ironically, then, Fenech’s critique must mobilize its own (secular) grand narrative in order to expose that of the *Tat Khalsa*.

It is worth noting that Michael Nijhawan’s recent *ethnographic* study examining the performance of martyrdom in the Sikh dhadi tradition succumbs to the same prejudices as Lou Fenech’s critique. [7] Nijhawan notes a sense of ambivalence in the way dhadis perceive martyrological themes in their repertoire. On the one hand, dhadis mobilize the commemorative and rhetorical dimensions of this sacrificial tradition to reproduce Sikh orthodoxy, on the other the performance of martyrdom, using metres and tropes that recall its Indic origin, signals an encounter with the hidden latitude of Sikh identity. This account seems to faithfully reproduce the experience of its dhadi subjects; however, by identifying a *distinction* between the rich pedigree of Sikh music and its pedagogic expression in modern Sikhism, a normative statement about religion is



being made. Nijhawan's sentimentalization of a Sikh tradition plugged into its "plural" heritage serves to keep religion in its proper place, outside politics, thus emasculating dissent to the secular monopolization of public discourse.

Another blind spot in the critical narrative of Sikh Studies is its naturalization of the idea that Khalsa discourse is *just* a grand narrative. While Fenech and Nijhawan are alert to the revision of martyrdom by the Tat Khalsa they fail to note that the appropriation of this tradition reflects the subaltern's desire to respond appropriately to colonial norms. Thus, the martyrologies of the Tat Khalsa were localized expressions of the rational view of sacrifice promoted by imperialism. The fact that the Khalsa story is rich in alternative interpretations of martyrdom is marginalized by Sikh Studies since it jeopardizes the tidy classification of religion which informs its secular agenda.

Brian Axel's study offers one example of how the Khalsa's martyrological narrative might be reinterpreted to reveal its ambiguity. Axel mobilizes Lacan's notion of the *mirror stage* to suggest how inchoate nations use an *image* of totality to acquire a sense of nationhood, a process that replaces loyalties with loyalty. He points out that the imagination of the State is often a violent affair, drawing attention to the way in which Indian identity was reproduced upon the broken bodies of *Khalistani* dissidents. [1] Axel notes how the web was used to circulate images of these martyrs within the Sikh diaspora, so that a transnational Sikh identity came to be imagined in terms of the bits and pieces of brutalized bodies. In this light, the Indian state's attempt to establish itself by erasing Sikh ethnonationalism is self-defeating since it fosters a transnational resistance to its aims, an act of resistance in which martyrological discourse plays a key role.

## Cross-References

- [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Sikhi](#)
- [Sikhism](#)
- [Singh Sabha/Reform Movements](#)

## References

1. Axel B (2001) The nation's tortured body: violence, representation and the formation of a Sikh "Diaspora". Duke University Press, Durham
2. Fenech LE (1997) Martyrdom and the Sikh tradition. *J Am Orient Soc* 4(117):623–642
3. Fenech LE (2000) Martyrdom in the Sikh tradition: playing the game of love. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. Fenech LE (2010) Martyrdom: W.H. McLeod and his students. *J Punjab Stud* 1(17):75–95
5. Keppley Mahmood C (1996) Fighting for faith and nation: dialogues with Sikh militants. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia
6. McLeod WH (1976) The evolution of the Sikh community. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
7. Nijhawan M (2006) Dhadi Darbar: religion, violence and the performance of Sikh history. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
8. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
9. Singh P (2006) Life and work of guru Arjan: history, memory and biography in the Sikh Tradition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
10. Talib GS (1997) Martyrdom. In: Singh H (ed) The encyclopaedia of Sikhism, vol 3. Panjabi University Press, Patiala

## Maryada

- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)

## Meditation (Sikhism)

Davinder Singh Panesar  
Institute of Mindfulness and Transpersonal Psychology, Barcelona, Spain

## Synonyms

*Anhad nad; Aum; Bhakti (bhagti); Dhyana; Insight; Japa; Mantra; Nam Japna; Nam Simran; Nitnem; Sikhism; Simran; Transcendental Meditation; Yoga*

## Definition

Sikh meditation is a practice which seeks ego-transcendence through a gradual process of realizing and immersing into the sacredness of one's self and thus Existence, union experienced as a nondual interconnected sovereign sacred Oneness.

## Simran- Presence in Present Moment Awareness (Mindfulness)

If one is ignorant of the mind, then one is ignorant of meditation.

In order to define meditation, it is important to place it within the context of mind, consciousness, awareness, ego and egolessness within Sikh philosophy. Mind is the internal faculty consisting of thought (*man*), memory/intention (*chit*), discrimination/intellect (*buddh/bodhi*) and I am-myself or I am-ness (*ahamkar*), the dynamic and continuous activity of ego. [5, 8, 9] Consciousness is the ground of being, the unchanging witness of all phenomenon. Awareness is directed attention through the application of intention. [2, 3] Ego or *haumai* is the continuous dynamic self-affirming, self-representing psychological "self" which is experienced ultimately as continuous self-grasping (*ahamkar*). [7]

The goal of Sikh meditation is ego-transcendence through a gradual process of realizing and immersing into the sacredness of one's self and thus Existence, union experienced as a nondual interconnected sovereign sacred Oneness. Sikh practices are geared towards the transformation of the ego-oriented conditioned mind, a continuous active self-attachment or *manmukh*, to a non-conditioned sovereign self or *gurmukh*. *Manmukh* (mind facing) is the "self" attached to itself, in other words, self-fusion with the content of the mind, emotions, sensations, body, desires etc., while *Gurmukh* (Guru/awareness facing) is self-identification with unchanging witnessing awareness. Sikh meditation practices are focused upon transcending duality towards the experience of *anand* or an unbound nondual pure consciousness self or *turiya*, a fourth state of consciousness beyond waking, dream, and sleep states. [5, 7, 9, 10]

*Trai Gun Maya Mohu Hai Gurmukh Chautha Padh Pae ||*

The three qualities hold people in attachment to Maya. The Gurmukh attains the fourth state of higher consciousness [1]

The choice of meditation practices determines the final state of consciousness achieved, either the path of *samadhi*, where the mind merges with its object, a gradual dissolving of the conditioned ego-self into self-in-union or Oneness, or, the path towards nirvana, where the mind takes itself as the object; where all phenomena are finally witnessed to be nothingness, emptiness; where the drop merges with the ocean. [9–11, 14–16]

Sikh practice recommends the discipline of *nam simran* or *nam japna*, mindfulness presence, a meditation practice which integrates concentration and insight (*vichar*), an interactive combination in which concentration multiplies the effectiveness of insight. [5, 7]

*Sargun Nirgun Nirankar Sun Samadhi Aap ||*

Formless and Form beyond stain, emptiness and samadhi is One

*Apan Kiya Nanaka Ape Hi Phir Jap ||1||*

Manifesting as creation, O Nanak, One meditates on One. ||1|| [1]

*Simran* is the practice of attuning one's awareness to a *sabd* in the form of a Mantra. *Sabd* here refers to any word considered as a *mantra*. The word mantra is composed in Sanskrit of two root words: *man* means "mind" or "thinking" and *tra* means to "swim across or release or free." Therefore, the meaning of mantra can be defined as that which frees the mind from the bondage of ego. [5, 7, 8]

*Man Re sabd tara cit lae ||*

O mind, swim across, by focusing your consciousness on the Shabad. [1]

Three types of Mantra are common in Sikh meditation practices: *Mul Mantra*, *Beej Mantra*, or/and *Gur Mantra*. The *Mul Mantra*, root or original mantra consists of 13 words, *ek-angkar Satt Nam Karta-Purkh Nir-bhau Nir-vair Akal-murat Ajuni Sai-bhan Gurbarsad*. *Beej Mantra*, or seed-mantra, is "ek-angkar" and "WaheGuru" is the *Gur Mantra*. [9, 10]

The path followed by Guru Nanak and the Sants or Bhagats is referred to as *Bhakti*, the

essence of which is to make the object, or *isth*, of one's devotion the central focus. [7, 13] Bhakti begins on a level of duality, with the practitioner being separate from the *isht*. However, through gradual practice, particularly the practice associated with "Prayer of the Heart", [5] the practitioner undergoes profound transformation on all levels of the self towards ego-transcendence.

The *isth* or the central authentic authority in Sikh meditation begins with *sabd* or word. *Sabd* according to Guru Nanak is the *satguru*, the authentic source of self-realization. [10]

*sabd guru surat dun cela ||*

The Shabad is the Guru, awareness is the discipline. [1]

*Nam simran* begins with cultivation of "present moment mindfulness", normally undertaken sitting upright and beginning with an acknowledgement and a sense of reverence of what one is about to undertake. [7]

The mind is initially allowed to settle into calmness by focusing on the flow of the breath at the nostrils and allowing the breath to breathe itself. Once the mind feels settled and calm, this is followed by *Jap*. [9, 10]

*Jap* is the recitation of the mantra at three levels. At the beginning the repetition of the mantra is aloud and as the practice matures, the mantra recitation gradually evolves from simple audible verbal recitation to silent verbalization and finally mental repetition or awareness of the presence of the mantra. *Nam simran* is also practised as *kirtan* in the form of chanting and singing, which can be performed in *sangat*, company of those on the path to self-realization. The spiritual evolution or the inner journey has defined stages which begin with "Jap" or recitation, consciously and regularly. *Jap* can be maintained in the midst of life's activity until the mind is gradually occupied with that one singular focal point. [10]

*Calat Baisat Sovat Jagat Gur Mantra Ridai Citar ||*

While walking and sitting, sleeping and waking, contemplate within your heart the GurMantra. Guru Arjan Dev. [1]

A key component to refining consciousness in *nam simran* is to listen to the recited sound; whenever one's awareness drifts or is distracted by

stimuli, such as, thought, sound, sensation, emotion, the practice is to become aware of its drift and then gently refocus awareness on hearing the recitation of the mantra. This helps the practitioner to internalize the meaning of the word and, more importantly, return one's attention to the word, enabling the cultivation of one-pointedness. [9, 10]

*Suniai Lagai Sehaj Dhian ||*

Listening-intuitively grasp the essence of meditation. [1]

## **Hirdai and Nam Simran**

*Hirdai*, *ridia*, and *ghatt* often translated as "Heart," are mentioned throughout Gurbani, the Sikh scriptures. *Hirdai* does not refer to the blood pumping physical heart in the body nor is it a reference to the psychological mind that is under the control of the *mayas* three qualities (*guna*), that is, *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. [6, 11, 14] The three *gunas* are the basic building blocks at the Causal level of existence, infinite pure potential according to Sikh teachings. *Hirdai* or the Spiritual Heart is the location of the phenomenological origin of thought as well as a somatic representation of one's self-sense and one's cognitive self and is considered to exert control over both the physical heart and the psychological mind.

*Ja ihu hirda deh nahoti tao man kithai rahata*

When this heart and body did not exist, where did the mind reside? (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, *sggs* 945)

*Hiradhai* is referred to in numerous ways, including *nij ghar* (inner home), *such mahal* (House of tranquility), *param purakh ki ghati* (Seat of consciousness), *sunni gupha* (Cave of Silence), *sunni sarovar* (Pond of Silence), *sunni mandal* (Sphere of Silence), *sukh aasan* (Seat of Peace), or *atam tirath* (sacred-abode of consciousness). [9, 10]

The *hiradai*, unlike the physical heart which is on the left side of the chest, is located on the right side of the chest, starting after the third rib and two digits to the right of the midpoint.

*Hirdai* focused meditation, also known as Prayer of the Heart, is an established formal spiritual discipline the roots of which can be found in the upanishads, Tibetan Tantric practices, the Alexandrian Gnostics, Sufi *dhikr*, or remembrance of Divine Names in the heart and *atam vichar* (self inquiry). Its practice enables a gradual process of ego transcendence towards a nondual union, as direct knowing, experiential means to self-knowledge. [14]

*Hirdai eko Nam Vasai Haumai Dubia Mar ||7||*

The One Name abides in his heart, conquering ego and duality. [1]

### **Nitnem (Daily Practice of Reciting and Reflecting)**

*Nitnem* is the daily routine observed by Sikhs which is based on Guru Nanak's discipline of nam simran discussed above. As with all practices, meditation or nitnem there are certain prerequisites, which include waking up before sunrise (*amritvela*) and bathing before settling into meditation and nitnem.

*Nitnem* consists of five separate compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth. First, the Sikh begins with a short centring prayer before proceeding to Guru Nanak's Japji Sahib, followed by Guru Gobind Singh's Jaap Sahib, Chaupai Sahib, the ten Savayyas, and finally Anand Sahib. In the evening, before sunset, the Sikh recites Rahiras. Before retiring to sleep, Kirtan Sohila is recited. All recitations at all times during the day will conclude with an ardas.

### **Cross-References**

- [Anhad Nad](#)
- [Aum](#)
- [Buddhi](#)
- [Gurmukh](#)
- [Insight](#)
- [Jivan-Mukti](#)
- [Mantra](#)

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Nitnem](#)
- [Transcendental Meditation](#)

### **References**

1. Adi Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh scriptures
2. Baars B (1997) In the theater of consciousness. Oxford University Press, New York
3. James W (1890) The principles of psychology (ed: Miller GA). Harvard University Press, 1983
4. Johnson WJ (2009) A dictionary of Hinduism. Oxford University Press, Oxford
5. Kolhi SS (1992) The Sikh philosophy. Sikh Brothers India, Amritsar
6. Louchakova O (2006) Spiritual heart and direct knowing in the prayer of the heart. Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto
7. Mandair A (2012) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed (guides for the perplexed). Bloomsbury Academic, New York
8. Maskeen S (2004) Panth Ratan Giani Sant Singh ji Maskeen at Prashant Vihar
9. Maskeen S (1998–2004) Panth Ratan Giani Sant Singh ji Maskeen, audio discourses
10. Nirmala TS (2009) Vivek Pradipika lighting source, UK
11. Potter KH (1981) Encyclopedia of Indian philosophies: Advaita Vedanta up to akara and his pupils, vol 3. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
12. Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (2001) Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity. Curzon Press, Surrey
13. Shackle C, Mandair A (2005) Teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Routledge, Oxon
14. Shankarananda S (2006) The Yoga of Kashmir Shaivism: consciousness is everything. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
15. Sharma C (1997) A critical survey of Indian philosophy. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
16. Wilber K (2000) Integral psychology. Shambhala Publications

### **Merit**

- [Virtues \(Sikhism\)](#)

### **Migrant**

- [Migration, Sikh](#)

## Migration, Sikh

Michael Hawley

Religious Studies, Mount Royal University,  
Calgary, AB, Canada

Religious Studies, University of Calgary, Calgary,  
AB, Canada

## Synonyms

[Diaspora](#); [Migrant](#); [Transnationalism](#)

## Definition

The movement of an individual or group from one locality (e.g., city, state/province, or country) to another.

## Introduction

From their origins in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, Sikhs today are found around the world in virtually every country. While the movement of Sikhs beyond the Punjab can be traced back to the time of Guru Nanak in the early sixteenth century, a Sikh presence outside the Indian subcontinent in South East Asia, Oceania, Africa, and subsequently in Europe, North America, and beyond is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon. This article offers a selective and summative account of the movement and major settlement patterns of Sikhs around the world.

## Types of Migration

Migration may be of various kinds. One may distinguish between *forced* migration in which people move against their will or out of concern for their personal safety and well-being (political, martial, environmental, or health reasons) on the one hand and *voluntary* migration (economic opportunities, family, make a new start) on the

other hand. At the same time, specific cases of migration may be mixed. Political refugees seeking personal security may migrate to places that offer opportunities for employment and financial security. Migration may be permanent, temporary, or transitory. Migrants may choose to emigrate to reunite permanently with family (chain migration). Alternatively, migrants may move temporarily for economic, political, or religious reasons. Migrants may also be transitory, remaining in one place for a limited time while on their way to a final destination, whether that destination is itself a permanent or temporary one.

When examining migrations, one must also take care to distinguish between the *process* of migration and the *consequences* of that migration. This is the difference between how migration takes place and the changes (social, economic, religious, political, cultural, etc.) that are brought about by that migration. Closely related to this is the distinction between migration and migrant. That is, the act of migrating as a phenomenon of study can be distinguished from the study of the agents (i.e., the migrants) who undergo the migration process.

## The Numbers Challenge

Acquiring accurate numerical data proves challenging in documenting migrants, migration, and post-migration settlement patterns. Sikh migration is no exception. Statistical data range considerably. A cursory survey of the number of Sikhs in Canada, for example, ranges from 278,410 according to the Statistics Canada 2001 Census (though United Sikhs puts the number closer to 400,000 in 2004) to an unconfirmed Government of Canada projected number of 800,000 in 2011.

The numbers challenge is informed by at least three main interrelated factors: census collection and methodologies, issues surrounding category formation and identity, and temporal and spatial ambiguities.

## Census Collection and Methodologies

One must consider the source of the statistics. Who is doing the counting can affect the number.



The United States Department of Immigration, community-based websites, and established scholars in the field, for example, may well arrive at different numbers when counting Sikh migrants. These groups may use different methods. Government censuses normally use established and accepted statistical methods whereas nongovernmental organizations may not be as rigorous in their methodologies or may appeal to more anecdotal evidence to support the numbers they claim. But there is variation in government censuses as well. The way a question is framed, the order in which questions are asked, whether the census form is detailed (long form) or summative (short form), and the political motivations and/or implications for the individual informant may all impact the results. Changes to the form and content of censuses within a country may pose comparative difficulties in analyzing changes over time within a given country. For example, the question concerning religious affiliation was simply dropped from the 2011 Statistics Canada census. Moreover, the form and content of censuses in different counties may vary making analysis between countries problematic. Category formation in these censuses may also not be consistent across space and time. Censuses may not distinguish between “Indian,” “Hindu,” “Sikh,” or “Asian.” Also, statistics may or may not distinguish “immigrant” from other official categories recognized by the state. Some migrants arrive as “refugees” or as seeking “political asylum.” Nor do published census data take into account recent variations in historical circumstances. Political, economic, and military conditions may cause unprecedented migration that is difficult at best to document with any numerical precision. The events of 1947, 1984, and post-2001 are problematic for this reason in documenting the movement and subsequent settlement of Sikhs. Finally, censuses do not account for illegal immigration, a phenomena that often follows in the wake of political, economic, and military instability and insecurity.

### Category Formation and Identity

A second set of issues turns on the problem of category formation and identity. Here, both

“immigrant” and “Sikh” are problematic. In terms of “immigrant,” when does one stop being classed as an immigrant? Is one an immigrant if he or she is born in the “destination” country? Does one cease to become an immigrant after one generation? After two generations? Three generations? Are naturalized citizens to be counted as immigrants? In terms of the category “Sikh,” is this the category migrants would use to describe themselves? Or is this an analytical presupposition on the part of the analyst? For example, early “Sikh” and “Hindu” Punjabi migrants to the west coast of Canada and the United States identified themselves not by “religious” designations but first and foremost as Punjabis. For these migrants, their journey to and subsequent settling in North America is a Punjabi story, not a particularly Sikh or Hindu one.

### Temporal and Spatial Ambiguities

Temporal and spatial ambiguities add a further dimension of complexity in determining migration patterns and numbers. While censuses can provide a sense of how many Sikhs there may be in a certain place at a certain time, the means by which those individuals arrived in the country (migration or birth) is often not known. Likewise, changes in the number of “migrants” may not be the product of movement, but of “conversion” as is often the diasporic case of white (“*gora*”) Sikhs through marriage or through sectarian affiliations such as the 3HO and Sikh Dharma. Ambiguities in Sikh migration may be the product of rapid migration through transit countries (e.g., Hong Kong for Vancouver-bound Sikhs, Poland for Europe-bound Sikhs) leading some Sikhs to be either missed or counted twice. Finally, the number of Sikhs and their settlement patterns in a given country may be the product of cartography rather than of migration. Can Sikh families in 1947 living in what became Pakistan or Afghanistan or Bangladesh be considered migrants? Contested national boundaries further complicate the numbers game.

Statistical data about Sikh migration, its processes, and settlement patterns is perforated with gaps and blind spots. Thus, the numerical data

provided in this article ought to be understood as provisional, tentative, and subject to the ongoing process of revision. The numerical data provided here are “best estimates” based upon available data drawn from a range of sources including official national censuses, current scholarly documentation, and online community-based resources. World Sikh population estimates vary widely, ranging from a very conservative 20 million to anecdotal projections in excess of 30 million. Most sources, however, would suggest a realistic (albeit somewhat conservative) current worldwide Sikh population of around 26 million. Of these, roughly 85 % live in Indian Punjab (21.5 million), 1.75 million live in India but outside the Punjab (approximately 7 %), and roughly two million live outside of India (roughly 8 %). Of these two million, three quarters (roughly 1.5 million) are concentrated in three countries: Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

### **Sikh Migration and Communities Within India**

Precolonial Sikh migration is largely confined to the broad geographical parameters of South Asia. Such a presence within South Asian but beyond Punjab was initially the result of the activity of the Sikh Gurus across north and central South Asia. These many small communities enjoy a continuing presence and many are the custodians of various shrines and sites connected with the Gurus and significant events in *panthic* history.

#### **Bihar and Orissa**

Bihar and Orissa are today home to roughly 30,000 Sikhs, many of whom are Nanak-panthis. [14] Here, Patna is the nexus of Sikh migration and history in the region. Sikh memory maintains that Patna was visited by Guru Nanak and by Guru Tegh Bahadur. The gurdwara at Patna commemorates the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh. Similarly, Handi Sahib was constructed in memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Many of Patna's Sikhs are self-employed or are engaged in commercial activities through their own businesses. In the years following partition in 1947, Patna witnessed

a small influx of Sikh migration. (For an extensive analysis of Sikhs in this region and in northeastern India, see [1] and [2]).

#### **Maharashtra**

Nanded, on the river Godavari in Maharashtra with approximately 165,000 Sikhs, is home to another important precolonial Sikh community. [14] Sikhs accompanied Guru Gobind Singh to Abchal Nagar (Nanded) in the early eighteenth century, and wherein the Guru lost his life in 1708. Abchal Nagar is one of the five *takhts* (“thrones” or seats of temporal authority) in Sikh tradition. As a major pilgrimage center, the Sikhs of Nanded are the custodians of the *takht* and its gurdwara, the latter constructed between 1832 and 1837 during the tenure of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Punjabi Sikhs migrated to Nanded to work as laborers at these sites. Many of Nanded's Sikhs are Hazuri and Nihang Khalsa Sikhs and are involved with the center's festivals and rites. Most notable and perhaps controversial of these is the *tilak* rite in which a goat is sacrificed (*jhatka*) at Bandi Chhor Diwas, Dussehra, and Holla Mohalla and is distributed as part of *langar* (communal kitchen).

In addition to those Sikhs in Bihar, Orissa, and Maharashtra, today there are roughly 1.5 million Sikhs who reside in India but beyond the geographic borders of modern Punjab.

### **Sikh Migration Beyond the Subcontinent**

With the annexation of the Punjab into British India in 1849, colonial and Punjabi economies and institutions became increasingly integrated. The railroad helped to link the Punjab's supply of raw materials to foreign markets. This new-found colonial context marked the beginning of a new era in Sikh migratory experience. Sikhs began to venture beyond the subcontinent to different destinations and for different reasons. First, indentured laborers had specific destinations as newly established labor agencies in the Punjab determined. Indentured labor markets included Fiji and the West Indies (e.g., Trinidad) for

plantation work. Indentured laborers also migrated to South and to East Africa to work in mines and on the railroads. Second, independent migrants took advantage of the free passage legislation to many of the colonies that were available until World War I. Likewise, independent migrants and those free laborers who were able to do so sought out other locations in the empire and its colonies. Third, Sikhs with army connections tended to follow their units and officers to new colonies. For this group more than for the others, economic prosperity allowed for migration to Vancouver and the US west coast via Hong Kong, as well as to Australia, and Britain. By World War I, Sikh regiments were deployed to many British colonies including Malaysia, the Mediterranean, British-administered African colonies and protectorates, as well as to continental Europe.

## **Sikhs in Hong Kong and South East Asia**

### **Hong Kong**

There are approximately 12,500–14,000 Sikhs in Hong Kong including roughly 500–600 refugees who arrived in the wake of 1984. [11] Sikh migrants first arrived in Hong Kong in the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these migrants took up high-demand jobs as police and with security forces. Those with ties to the Indian Army were able to use the influence of British officers to help them find work. Some became laborers with the railway. By the 1890s, the Khalsa Diwan (Hong Kong) Sikh Temple constructed in 1901 served as a religious and cultural center for the fledgling community. In 1952, the police force was “nationalized.” Consequently, Sikh personnel were expelled from the force. Some migrated to various locations in South East Asia. Others migrated to the United Kingdom. Today, many Sikhs in Hong Kong are professionals in the medical, legal, and financial sectors. ([6], pp. 206–209)

### **Malaysia (Including Singapore)**

A small number of Sikhs arrived in the Malay peninsula as political prisoners in the first half of the nineteenth century. Most notable was Maharaj

Singh who arrived in 1849 in the aftermath of the second Anglo-Sikh War. By the 1870s, Sikhs began migrating to Malay through their army connections. Settling largely in the state of Perak, many of these early Sikhs worked in occupations relating to law enforcement and security. ([6], pp. 156–167, 176–188) In the decades that followed, the Malay government began recruiting Sikhs directly from the Punjab. Other Sikh migrants ventured into dairy farming and became bullock-cart drivers. Malaysia and Singapore today are home to between 100,000 and 130,000 Sikhs (Malaysia) and 15,000 Sikhs (Singapore). [11] It is estimated that between 500 and 750 of these migrants arrived in the region as refugees after 1984.

### **Thailand (Siam)**

From Malaysia and Hong Kong (post 1952), many Sikhs migrated to Thailand (Siam). The first Sikhs however to settle in Thailand arrived in the 1880s directly from Punjab. Kirpa Ram Madan and his family were the vanguard of not only Sikh but of Indian migration to Thailand. In Thailand, Sikhs have worked in a variety of occupations from tin miners and railway workers in the 1930s to hotel owners in Phuket today. Thailand’s 85,000 Sikhs, [11] of whom between 1,500 and 2,500 arrived after 1984 as refugees, have established 17 gurdwaras throughout the country; the first of these was constructed in Bangkok in 1912.

## **Sikhs in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji**

### **Australia**

There are approximately 57,000 Sikhs in Australia [7] of which up to 1,000 arrived as refugees after Operation Bluestar and the pogroms that followed. The history of Sikh migration to Australia can be divided into three broad periods. In the pre-federation period (prior to 1901), Sikhs began to arrive in Australia in the 1830s. Sikh migrants took up work in cane fields and herding, primarily sheep. By the 1860s, Sikhs joined Afghan migrants serving as camel drivers who sought to explore the Australian interior. Sikhs were also reported in the goldfields surrounding Victoria during this time. By the end of the

century, Sikh migrants from Punjab, but also some from Malaysia and Hong Kong, had carved out livelihoods as peddlers selling a range of items from farm goods to clothing to sewing needles. At the time, licenses for such small business enterprises were restricted to British subjects. This gave Sikhs a clear advantage over their Afghan and Chinese would-be competitors. Profits were often sent home to family and the *biradari* in the Punjab, while many invested in business space and real estate, particularly in New South Wales. ([6], pp. 383–385)

Immigration to Australia was severely curtailed with the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act (White Australia Policy) in 1901. On the one hand, this policy effectively stopped immigration to all who were neither merchants nor students, who themselves were issued limited term entry permits. On the other hand, it had a chilling effect on Australian Sikhs seeking to visit the Punjab, for having departed they would be subsequently denied reentry to Australia. But by the interwar years, Australian Sikhs earned respect as a “martial” race, and by the 1930s Sikhs were allowed limited property rights, a pension, and the right to vote and were permitted to bring their sons to work on the continent. Many of these Sikhs found employment in the cane fields or on the railways. Following World War II, many Sikhs returned to the Punjab to care for and to protect their families during the civil violence in the aftermath of partition. In postwar Australia, Sikhs earned entry into hitherto barred industries, purchasing land and starting their own banana farms. This settlement and entrepreneurial success prompted further chain migration. Sikh men started to bring their wives to Australia, and a new wave of second-generation Australian Sikhs soon followed. ([6, 10], pp. 383–385)

The disestablishment of the White Australia Policy in 1973 spurred Sikh migration not only from India but from other countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Fiji, as well as those seeking refuge from the political turmoil in Uganda. Some also migrated from the United Kingdom. Australia’s Sikhs are mainly urbanites, with Melbourne being home to the largest concentration of Sikhs. Adelaide is host to the Annual Sikh Australian Games. [7]

## New Zealand

Pushed by the economic hardships in Punjab at the turn of the twentieth century, the first Sikh migrants arrived in New Zealand via Australia in the 1890s. With few exceptions, Sikh migrants were not professionally trained and took up occupations in agriculture. In postwar New Zealand, employment opportunities shifted to urban centers in which Sikhs invested in convenience stores. New Zealand’s 10,000 Sikhs [11] are concentrated in and around Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.

## Fiji

From New Zealand, some Sikh went on to Fiji. Fiji is home to 2,500 Sikhs. [12] In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, only around 200 of the 22,000 indentured laborers leaving from Calcutta for Fiji were Sikh. By the turn of the century, the first free Sikh migrants mainly from the Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts arrived, attracted by the financial promise in the lucrative sugarcane industry. Others entered sought employment as teachers and some turned to policing. Sikh police officers were also recruited from Hong Kong and mainland China, largely Shanghai. Fiji is home to a sizable Ravidasi community, and the first Ravidasi gurdwara outside of India was established in Nasinu in 1943. While some Sikhs in Fiji married Hindu women, many returned to Punjab to marry, later bringing their wives to the island. [12] In the latter case, family and *biradari* ties have tended to remain strong among Fijian Sikhs. The initial arrival of Ravidasis spurred further migration of the community from India. Fijian Sikhs have used their geographical position for further mobility, migrating to both North America (Canada and the United States) and South America (Argentina).

## South Asia and the Middle East: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and United Arab Emirates

### Pakistan

There are no reliable figures for Sikhs in Pakistan, nor are there reliable records that document the recent movement of Sikhs into the country.

Population estimates range from 2,000 (*al Jazeera*) to 20,000 (US State Department). The majority of Pakistani Sikhs are largely nonmigrants, residing in and around the Peshawar region since before the creation of the modern nation-state in 1947. Recently, a small number of Sikhs have migrated to Pakistan from Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding the paucity of statistical data relating to Sikhs in the country, Sikhs have made an impact and have earned a place in the public eye. Sikhs have occupied posts in the police service, the Pakistan People's Party, and the Pakistani army. The government of Pakistan legislated in 2007 the Anand Marriage Act recognizing Sikh marriage. [15]

### Afghanistan

Reliable statistical data on the Sikhs in contemporary Afghanistan is also elusive. While a small number of Nanak-panthis has been documented in the region since the time of the Gurus, the rise of Sikh migration into Afghanistan occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of these Sikhs, largely from Amritsar, it seems were khatri who had turned khalsa and who migrated to the region to establish outposts for commercial purposes. Some Sikhs also arrived in the nineteenth century as members of the British Army. Prior to the invasion of the country by the USSR in 1979, the region was home to roughly 200,000 Sikhs. Under the Taliban, cremation was prohibited, and Sikh men were required to wear yellow patches and women to be veiled. Today, the Sikh population in Afghanistan is estimated between 170 and 3,000 families, the majority residing in Kabul and Jalalabad, the location of Afghanistan's three gurdwaras. [9]

### United Arab Emirates (UAE)

India's close historical and commercial ties with the Gulf States have attracted in excess of 50,000 Sikhs to the region. [11] The majority of Sikhs reside in Dubai who began to arrive in 1963 (when oil exports first flowed from Dubai) and who secured work permits as petroleum technicians and managers. Of these, many are Punjabi expatriots though some are from Pakistan. Despite

their minority status, Sikhs and more generally the Indian diaspora in the UAE have carved out a cultural and religious space for themselves. The community has been allowed to establish cremation grounds, and the largest gurdwara in the region, the Guru Nanak Darbar, was completed in early 2012 and serves 10,000.

### Africa: East Africa

The vast majority of Sikh migration to East Africa occurred between 1890 and 1970. In the 1890s, despite being a small minority of South Asian migrants to the region, Punjabis (mostly Sikh) supplied nearly all indentured labor for the Ugandan railway. The overwhelming majority of these Sikhs were Ramgharia. Most Sikhs were temporary migrants on a 3- to 5-year contract, tempted there by an unrealized scheme for land for those working on the railway. As a result, nearly 80 % left Uganda, the vast majority returning to Punjab, when their contract expired. Of those who stayed on, many found employment with the railway as station masters, telegraph operators, mechanics, carpenters, and other artisans. Later, some became peddlers along the railway line, and later some became shop owners. From World War I to 1972, Sikh migration to East Africa rose steadily, and Sikhs increasingly found employment in the civil service. This rise in migration was spurred by Sikhs arriving through the British army during and following the war. The East African Rifles, based in Mombasa, Kenya, initially employed 3,000 Sikhs. Increased migration also gave rise to a natural population increase and the emergence of second-generation East African Sikhs. By 1960, there were over 21,000 Sikhs in Kenya and in excess of 250,000 Sikhs in Uganda. They were carpenters, electricians, clerks, teachers, contractors, shopkeepers, and other skilled labor. Sikhs were involved in trade unions, sports, and community organizations. With Kenya's independence in 1960 followed by Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians in 1972, many East African Sikhs migrated to the United Kingdom, though some ventured as far as the United States and Canada. ([6], pp. 254–261)



## Continental Europe

Sikh migration to continental Europe is a relatively recent phenomenon. Moreover, the history and types of migration (voluntary, chain, forced, and transit) vary significantly from country to country. At the same time, Sikh experiences across the continent have been shaped by the culture and politics of their “host” countries. Many Sikhs chose to migrate to continental Europe in wake of restrictive immigration legislation passed in the UK in the 1970s. Settling first in Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and then later in Italy, Portugal, and Spain, Sikhs today can be found in virtually every country on the continent.

### The Netherlands

Historically, the Netherlands is among the earliest points of migration for Sikhs arriving on the continent. Sikh soldiers first encountered the Dutch while serving in Indonesia prior to and during World War II. This contact motivated some of the earliest Sikh migration to continental Europe. The Netherlands also witnessed a wave of Sikh migrants following the turmoil in India in 1984. That wave saw between 2,500 and 3,500 Sikhs take refuge in the Netherlands. Today, Sikhs in the Netherlands number roughly 12,000 concentrated in and around Amsterdam, Den Haag, and Rotterdam and who support five gurdwaras. [11]

### Italy

With over 75,000 Sikhs and 22 gurdwaras, Italy is the home to the largest number of Sikhs in continental Europe. Sikhs began to arrive in the province of Latina in the 1980s and most entered into the agricultural sector as farm laborers. Confronted by low wages and seasonal work, Sikhs subsequently migrated to the Lombardy and Reggio-Emilia regions. Just under half of Italy's Sikhs continue to reside in this region making their living as farmers. In the late 1990s, Sikhs also began to settle in the province of Vicenza wherein they found employment in the low-paying tanning sector. Sikhs are engaged in a broad spectrum of sectors as metalworkers, tanners, cheese makers, woodworkers, and cobblers

in the province of Caserta. (For a detailed analysis of Sikhs in Italy, see [13], pp. 133–162).

### Germany

Figures for the number of Sikhs in Germany vary widely ranging from 12,000 to 50,000. This range includes roughly 12,000 Sikhs who came to Germany as refugees in the mid-1980s as well as those from Afghanistan fleeing persecution under Taliban rule. Further complicating the issue is a marked increase since 2000 in the number of converts to Sikhism among the native Germans. A conservative estimate would place the number of Sikhs in Germany at 30,000–35,000. There are 20 gurdwaras in Germany and are, like their patrons, concentrated in Frankfurt, Koln, Cologne, and Stuttgart. [13]

### Belgium

Sikh soldiers first set foot on Belgian soil during World War I. The first few migrant Sikhs, however, arrived in Belgium as part of the exodus from Uganda following Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion of Asians. It was not until post-1984 that Belgium witnessed a significant rise in Sikh migration. These forced migrants were predominantly male laborers. Possessing limited education many worked on fruit farms in Limburg province and shared accommodations to defer expenses. Even today, roughly one third of Belgium's Sikhs can be found in this area. In the 1990s, Sikh migration to Belgium turned from forced to overwhelmingly voluntary. Sikhs began to arrive for economic reasons, seeking prosperity first as laborers on fruit farms and then as shop owners in their own right. This economic success encouraged an ongoing process of chain migration for wives and family members. These economically successful Sikhs have settled largely in the capital, Brussels. Since their initial arrival, Sikhs have constructed five gurdwaras to support a constituency of roughly 10,000. [11]

### France

France is home to 15,000 Sikhs, of whom 3,000–4,000 are refugees. The first Sikh migrants arrived in France in the early 1980s. These Sikh pioneers set up new institutions, networks, and

associations to nurture the fledging community. The second wave of migrants followed in the wake of 1984. Many of these forced migrants claimed refugee status and many of these sought political asylum while their refugee claims were being reviewed by the French authorities. Sikh migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and illegal migrants clustered in the Bobigny section of Paris. Bobigny is home to the only gurdwara in Paris. Sikhs in France lived largely in anonymity until 2004 when the French government introduced legislation against wearing religious symbols in schools. Public demonstrations by Sikhs drew the community into the spotlight. This also spurred the opening of a Sikh private school, the Shere Punjab Complexe, in 2007. The majority of Sikhs in Bobigny are young men, most of whom are Jat or Ravidasi. Recently, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women and children. A second generation of French Sikhs is beginning to emerge. (For a striking ethnographic study of Sikhs in France, see [16], pp. 163–178).

### Spain

Sikh migration to Spain began in the late 1990s. Primarily Lubana, Jat, and Ravidasi Sikhs settled in Catalonia and found gainful employment in the construction and catering sectors. The Ravidasis in Spain are notable as they have separate gurdwara. The Ravidasis are also highly community conscious, particularly since the “Vienna incident” in 2009 in which a Ravidasi leader was killed. Since then, the Ravidasis have claimed a separate identity from Sikhism, a move that has included the substitution of the Guru Granth Sahib with a volume of poetry from Ravidas. (For a nuanced treatment of the Ravidasi community in Spain, see [16], pp. 179–200).

### Poland

With roughly 700 Sikhs in the country, Poland boasts the largest Sikh community in Eastern Europe. Most Sikh migrants arrived after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. While some Sikhs settled mostly around Warsaw, many migrants use Poland as a transit country to access other destinations in Europe. Poland is home to Eastern Europe’s only gurdwara. The gurdwara

attracts both Sikhs and Sindhis. (For a fine examination of Sikhs in Poland, see [16], pp. 115–129).

### Nordic Countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark

As is the case with so many other countries on the continent, Sikh migrations to Nordic Europe began in the 1980s. Together, the Nordic countries boast roughly 14,000 Sikhs: 5,000 in Norway; Denmark and Sweden are each home to 4,000 Sikhs, and there are approximately 500 Sikhs who have settled in Finland. The majority of Sikhs to first migrate to these countries were men who came in search of higher living standards or to escape the economic and political uncertainty in post-1884 India. Once they secured employment (and often citizenship), chain migration was set in motion when the wives and children of these Nordic Sikhs subsequently migrated. The ability of Sikhs to integrate into Nordic societies has varied. For example, whereas Sikhs in the Swedish police are permitted to wear turbans, at the same time the Danish High Court ruled in 2006 that it was illegal for Sikhs to carry the kirpan. ([16], pp. 1–10)

### United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

Today, England is home to approximately 420,000 Sikhs, and over 300 gurdwaras primarily concentrated in and around London, Southall, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, and Leicester. The largest gurdwara outside of India is Southall’s Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha. There are approximately 7,000 Sikhs in Scotland and 8 gurdwaras. There are 3,000 Sikhs in Wales and less than 300 in Northern Ireland. [11]

Perhaps the first Sikh in England in 1849 was Maharaja Dalip Singh, the youngest son and heir to “the lion of the Punjab,” Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A few decades later, a small number of Punjabis many of whom were Sikh also came to London, England, temporarily in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They sought to further their education in order to capitalize on the

opportunities available to them in various departments of the Indian Civil Service.

The first substantive wave of permanent settlers began to arrive in England during the interwar period. Beginning in the 1920s, Bhat Sikhs started to arrive from the Sialkot District and began to settle in northern England, Wales, and in Scotland. Perthshire, Scotland, was the residence of Maharaja Dalip Singh in 1854. Scottish Sikhs today have their own tartan. Most early Bhat Sikhs worked as peddlers. Doabians also began to arrive in England during these years, but most migrated in the postwar years as a result of chain migration. ([21], pp. 47–48)

In the 1950s, Britain started importing labor from ex-colonies to meet an increasing demand for laborers. Single, young, male Sikhs helped to fill this need. In some cases, ex-servicemen came on the voucher system, while still others mortgaged land in Punjab. Initially, these Sikhs were temporary migrants. But, increasingly restrictive immigration laws, adaption to their new lives in England often postponed the return. Instead, temporary migration turned to chain migration as families joined these migrants for permanent settlement. ([21], pp. 49–50)

The introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) signaled a backlash against colored immigration in England, curtailing severely new immigration from South Asia. At the same time, the Act allowed for a rapid increase in chain migration. Migration to Great Britain peaked during the 1960s. In a similar vein, Sikhs who could immigrate to England in the wake of Idi Amin's expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in 1972 did so, while many others sought refuge in other European countries. Sikhs from Hong Kong also contributed to this wave of "twice migrants." (See section on [Continental Europe](#) above.) Many of these "twice migrants" from East Africa and Hong Kong were drawn to London's suburbs, while the Punjabi migrants tended to live close to the factories in which they worked. The majority of early Punjabi migrants were industrial workers; only a few were professionals. However, Hong Kong and East African Sikhs brought with them capital, professional skills, and settled in a better class of housing.

There has been a gradual shift in subsequent generations from manual factory labor to skilled professional activities.

Sikh migration to England was further curtailed by the British Nationality Act (1981) which effectively excluded oversea "citizen" from living in Britain. This resulted in Sikh migration being limited to reunions, illegal migrants, and asylum seekers. Immediately following the tragic events of 1984, an estimated 5,000–7,500 Sikhs seeking political asylum settled in Britain.

## South America

Documenting patterns of Sikh migration and settlement in Central and South America is in its most nascent stages. What little documentation there is suggests a conservative 500–1,000 Sikhs in the entire region. (The vanguard survey of Sikhs in South America is 18).

### Argentina

Argentina has perhaps the longest historical record of Sikh migration in the area. Sikhs began to arrive in here in the late nineteenth century. Early Sikh migrants arrived via a multitude of routes, but the initial port of entry was Buenos Aires. Many of these early migrants may have intended to come to Argentina temporarily, opting instead to further migrate to the United States and Canada. Those who chose to remain in Argentina often married locally, and given their small numbers, many have adapted to the broader facets of Argentinean life. Argentina's roughly 300 Sikhs, some third generation, are concentrated in Salta and the northern provinces. ([18], pp. 88–97)

### Brazil

Brazil was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely a transit country on the way to Argentina for Sikhs. Destination migration to Brazil began just prior to the start of World War I. Some Sikh migrants were drawn by Brazil's agricultural promise, while others found work on the railroads. The small numbers of Sikhs migrating to geographically expansive Brazil resulted in

a lack of connection between Sikh migrants and ultimately to their decline. Today, there are only about 100 Sikhs in Brazil. Most of these are professional or business owners in and around Sao Paulo. The visibility of Sikhs in Brazil is maintained by the small but active presence of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) founded by Yogi Bhaajan in 1969 in the United States. ([18], pp. 175–179)

### **Bolivia**

Like Brazil, Bolivia was largely a transit country for a handful of Sikhs venturing on to Argentina, the United States, or Canada. Those who remained in Bolivia tended to be non-turbaned Sikhs. These Sikhs took up farming, and some earned enough to purchase land. Due to the desire to secure more land, many found themselves overextended in lean agricultural years. This led to a decline in Bolivia's Sikh community from roughly 200 families in the 1980s to between 30 and 50 individuals at present. The 3HO also enjoys a modest presence in Bolivia. ([18], pp. 151–154)

## **North America: Canada, United States, and Mexico**

### **Canada**

Canada is home to the largest Sikh population outside of India. Canada's Sikhs are concentrated in the lower mainland of British Columbia (Vancouver, Surrey, Abbotsford), in the greater Toronto area (Brampton), and in Alberta (Calgary and Edmonton). Sikh numbers in Canada have risen dramatically over the past 20 years from around 147,500 in 1991, to roughly 278,500 in 2001, to an estimated 600,000 in 2013.

The catalyst for Sikh migration to Canada can be attributed to army connections after the first Sikh regiment landed in British Columbia following Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Some Sikhs returned to west coast ports such as Vancouver and Victoria (as well as to ports such as San Francisco further south along the Pacific coast) in later years. By the turn of the century, these first migrants were joined by other Sikhs posted in the Far East (in particular Hong Kong)

after their tenure expired. Expansion in lower mainland British Columbia's agricultural sector and lumber mill industry saw the Sikh population grow from less than 300 at the turn of the century to over 5000 by 1908. The Khalsa Diwan Society was founded in 1907 by Teja Singh, a Sikh at Columbia University who travelled between New York and Vancouver. The Sikh gurdwara in Abbotsford was constructed in 1911 and is the oldest standing gurdwara in North America.

Racial fear and distrust on the part of white Canadians led to a dramatic decline in Sikh migration in the five years prior to World War I with arrival of fewer than 30 Sikhs. The Continuous Journey Regulation (1914) effectively stopped all Sikh migration. The legislation required would-be migrants to make a continuous journey from their country of origin (India) to Canada, an impossibility since there was no direct service between the two countries. As British subjects, members of the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver agitated for free movement within the empire. The arrival in Vancouver harbor in May 1914 of the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese steamship chartered by Gurdit Singh in Hong Kong and carrying 376 passengers (340 of whom were Sikh), proved a defining moment in Sikh migration to Canada. For 2 months, the ship sat in Vancouver harbor, its passengers (but for 20) were not allowed to land, and the ship was eventually forced to return to India.

The lifting of restrictive immigration policies in postwar Canada and their further liberalization in the 1960s facilitated a dramatic rise in Sikh chain migration to Canada. Unlike the United States, the majority of Sikhs have been eager to sponsor relatives to join them in Canada and to maintain their close ties with family, *pind*, and *biradari*. This pattern of chain migration has contributed to an overall decline in the overall ratio of independent professionals migrating to Canada.

### **United States**

The Sacramento Valley is home to the highest density of the roughly 500,000 Sikhs in the United States. But Sikhs have also settled along the eastern seaboard, the Midwest (Illinois and Michigan), and in the southern states.

Early migration history closely tied to Canada with the first migrants arriving on the west coast in the late nineteenth century. Early migrants were predominately young Jat males who were attracted by the lumber industry in Washington and Oregon, as well as the farm labor opportunities in these states and further south in California. While some migrated directly to the west coast, others came to the United States by way of British Columbia.

Like their coreligionists in Canada, Sikhs in the United States faced overt discrimination in the early years of the twentieth century. The arrival of migrant workers employed by the local lumber mill in Bellingham, WA, sparked anti-Asian protests and riots in 1907. White laborers claimed Sikh and other South Asian migrants took jobs from white workers and drove down wages. On September 4, 1907, white rioters assaulted migrant workers, looted property and homes, and effectively drove south Asian migrant workers from the city.

Following the *Komagata Maru* incident in Vancouver (see above), nearly one third of Vancouver's Sikhs migrated to the United States and settled in Washington, Oregon, and California. Here, some Sikhs enjoyed secured well-paying jobs with Pacific Railways while others continued to make their livelihood in the lumber industry. Those with fewer skills made their way to Yuba City and surrounding area and gained employment as farm laborers in the fruit orchards. Jawala Singh arrived in California in 1908 via Panama and Mexico helped to establish the Pacific Khalsa Diwan Society. Jawala Singh was *granthi* of the Stockton gurdwara, the first gurdwara in the United States established in 1912. He was also actively involved in the Hindustan Ghadar Party. (For an analysis of Sikhs in California, see [19]; for Sikhs and the Ghadar movement, see [8]).

Similar to the situation in interwar Canada, increasingly restrictive barriers to emigration were put into place, and voting rights and land ownership limited. Sikh migration to the United States virtually ceased, and Sikh numbers on the west coast fell during these years. There were,

nonetheless, illegal migrants entering the United States from Mexico. Many of these migrants settled in southern California in and around the area of the Salton Sea. The warped gender demographics of the Sikh community resulted in many male Sikhs marrying Mexican women, speaking Spanish at home, and baptizing their children in the Catholic tradition. (The key ethnographic study of Sikh-Mexican interaction is 20).

The postwar era witnessed a reversal of restrictive immigration policies, policies that were further liberalized in the 1960s. The Luce-Cellar Act (1946) loosened immigration restrictions, allowing for increased migration, US citizenship, and the ownership of property. The Act spurred a wave of chain migration as well as of new migrants. While Sikhs migrated to both the east and west coast, the largest and fastest growing community was in Yuba City, California. The flow of Sikh migration since the 1960s has corresponded with a demographic shift from largely rural farmers and laborers to a significant number of professionals. Migration and settlement is no longer concentrated in California.

Sikh numbers in the United States, and throughout the Americas, have been bolstered by the presence of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) founded in 1969 by Yogi Bha-jan based in Espanola, New Mexico. Sometimes inaccurately referred to as "white Sikhs," the 3HO is represented by persons' diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Punjabi. While some in the 3HO are of Punjabi Sikh families, many are "converts" to Sikh Dharma and identify as Sikh. There are roughly 5,000 3HO Sikhs in the United States, and there is emerging now a third generation of 3HO.

While the 3HO has a worldwide presence, its presence can be most strongly felt in Europe and the Americas. The continued Sikh presence in much of South and Central America can be attributed to the success of 3HO. Given its headquarters' proximity to Mexico and the intermarriage between Punjabi men and Mexican women not uncommon in southern California, it is not surprising that the 3HO enjoys a considerable following in Mexico.



## Cross-References

- [Amritdhari](#)
- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)
- [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Chief Khalsa Diwan](#)
- [Dalip Singh, Maharaja](#)
- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)
- [Sikhs and Empire](#)
- [Festivals \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Folklore \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Ghadar Movement](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Khalistan](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Marriage \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Punjab](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)
- [Ravidas \(Raidas\)](#)
- [Takhts](#)
- [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Banerjee H (2003) The other Sikhs: a view from Eastern India, vol 1. Manohar Publishers, Delhi
2. Banerjee H (2013) Bridging the Sikh Diaspora. In: Hawley M (ed) Sikh Diaspora: theory, agency, and experience. Brill, Leiden (forthcoming)
3. Barrier NG, Dusenbery VA (eds) (1989) The Sikh Diaspora: migration and the experience beyond Punjab. South Asia Books, Columbia
4. Basran GS, Singh Bolaria B (2003) The Sikhs in Canada: migration, race, class and gender. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
5. Bhatti R, Dusenbery VA (eds) (2001) A Punjabi Sikh community in Australia: from Indian Sojourners to Australian citizens. Neighbourhood Centre, Woolgoolga
6. Lal BV (ed) (2006) The encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu
7. Census Reveals Rise of Indians in Australia. Indian Herald, July 23, 2012. <http://indian-herald.com.au/australian-news/census-reveals-rise-of-indians-in-australia/2050/>
8. Gould H (2006) Sikhs, Swamis, students, and Spies: the India Lobby in the United States, 1900–1946. Sage, New Delhi
9. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Afghanistan)
10. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Australia)
11. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_by\\_country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_by_country)
12. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_Fiji](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Fiji)
13. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Germany)
14. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_India)
15. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_in\\_Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Pakistan)
16. Jacobsen KA, Myrvold K (eds) (2011) Sikhs in Europe: migration, identities and representations. Ashgate, Surrey
17. Johnson H (2004) Sikhs in Canada. In: Ember M et al (eds) Encyclopaedia of Diasporas: immigrant and refugee culture around the world. Kluwer/Plenum, Dordrecht
18. Kalhon SS (2012) Sikhs in Latin America: travels among the Sikh Diaspora. Manohar, Chandigarh
19. Brack Bruce L (1988) The Sikhs of northern California: 1904–1986. AMS Press, New York
20. Leonard K (1992) Making ethnic choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans. Temple University Press, Philadelphia
21. Singh G, Tatla DS (2006) Sikhs in Britain: the making of a community. Zed Books, London

## Mind (Sikhism)

Davinder Singh Panesar  
Institute of Mindfulness and Transpersonal  
Psychology, Barcelona, Spain

M

## Synonyms

*Atma; Bodhi; Buddhi; Man*

## Definition

The mind is the seat of perception, cognition, and awareness. It is linked to notions of consciousness. Through the meditative practice of mindfulness one can change the mind from a manmukh to a gurmukh perspective.

## Mind

The mind can be considered to have three aspects, namely perception, cognition and awareness, perception through sensory awareness, cognition

as reflective awareness and consciousness as untainted awareness. Consciousness is self-manifesting, self-illuminating, content-less, unknowable as an object of cognition, yet foundational for all awareness and knowledge. It is embodied within a person as *atma*, linked to the mind, manifesting as transcendental and phenomenal reflected awareness in the individualized mind. [1]

The embodied consciousness, *atma*, is constrained by the body–mind complex (*jiva*) while the mind itself may be considered unconscious. The uniqueness of the *jiva* enables it to reflect consciousness such that its contents are revealed and illuminated by the embodied consciousness. Thus, the *jiva* becomes conscious like a light bulb illuminating the lampshade, where the light bulb may be considered as the content-less, formless, self-illuminated consciousness, and the lampshade as the mind. [1–3]

Through this illumination the mind manifests subjective experience or the phenomenal aspect of consciousness or awareness. Through this sense of subjectivity as phenomenal awareness, the mind is conditioned into binding itself with the content of its awareness, including thoughts, intellect, memory, and all phenomenal activity into a false identity, or *ahamkar* or (I-am-ness). [2, 3]

The five “thieves” increasingly fuse awareness with the content of the mind and other phenomena rather than awareness itself. [4, 5] The sense of attachment (*moh*) gives rise to yet other psychological patterns which create a sense of craving/grasping/ desiring (*trishna*), again conditioning the mind towards greed (*lob*), insatiable craving. Unfulfilled greed manifests as anger (*karod*) and residual unresolved anger gives rise to yet more craving or lust (*kam*) for another object of attachment, to begin the cycle again once again, *Ahamkar* or a continuous recreation of the sense of “I” am-ness. This self-identification complex or the activity of ego is what is transcended with meditation practice of *nam simran* by drawing awareness to the *sabd* or sound and gradually breaking free from the false sense of self to directly experience pure consciousness or authentic self. [5–7]

## Mindfulness and Self-transformation of the Mind

Two central terms for human existence are *manmukh* and *gurmukh*. [5] Through the grace of Satguru, the authentic source of enlightenment, every conditioned-self has the potential to find release from the false sense of self and experience a sovereign sacred self, *atma parkas*. Guru Nanak advocates the practice of *nam simran*—mindful remembrance of *nam* and *sabd*—the source of enlightenment through direct experience, through the potentiality which exists within all. *Nam simran* and *seva* or selfless activities enable the conditioned mind to liberate itself from an anxiety and fear-based experience of social existence to an all encompassing sovereign state grounded in acceptance, unconditional love, and compassion for existence, or *gurmukh* state (Guru facing or identified with awareness). [4, 7, 8]

*Gurmukh* is the realized-self, the authentic experience of sovereign sacred existence. This transformation is achieved through ego transcendence, by overcoming duality to a lived experience as a nondual ego-less sovereign existence. Sikh philosophy provides authentic sources and resources from self-realized researchers of consciousness on mind and existence that enable the transformation of self from *manmukh* (false-ego facing) to a *gurmukh* (self-realized sovereign state). [4, 5]

## Cross-References

- [Consciousness](#)
- [Dreams \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gurmukh](#)
- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Philosophy](#)

## References

1. Schweizer P (1962) Mind/consciousness dualism in sankhya-yoga philosophy. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
2. Forman RKC (1998) What does mysticism have to teach us about consciousness? *J Conscious Stud* 5(2):185–201
3. Lancaster BL (2004) Approaches to consciousness. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

4. Kolhi SS (1992) The Sikh philosophy. Sikh Brothers India, Amritsar
5. Mandair A (2012) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed (guides for the perplexed). Bloomsbury Academic, New York
6. Muthu Mohan N (2002) Sikhism and contemporary problems of religious philosophy (in the context of 21st century). Sikh Spectrum Monthly, No. 4, August 2002
7. Singh N-GK (2005) The birth of the Khalsa, a feminist RE-memory of Sikh Identity. State University of New York Press, New York
8. Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (2001) Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity. Cruzon press, Surrey

## Mirasi(s)

### ► Dhadi(s)

## Miri Piri

Harpreet Singh

Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

## Definition

*Mīrī-Pīrī* is a central notion in the Sikh tradition which reflects the inseparability of the religious and political spheres of society. The importance of the doctrine is that it gives rise to an ethical obligation to be actively engaged in society at all level while it disallows a retreat to faith. This idea is integral to Sikh praxis and the manner in which Sikhs should respond to issues like social justice.

## Miri-Piri: A Temporal Pursuit of Oneness

*Mīrī-Pīrī* is a central Sikh doctrine reflecting the inseparability of religious and political dimensions in Sikh practice. *Mīrī* is derived from the Persian *mīr*, which is a contraction of the Arabic *amīr* (lit. commander, prince) and represents temporal power, while *pīrī* from the Persian *pīr* (lit. spiritual guide), represents religious authority. [5]

The nonduality of *mīrī-pīrī* can be traced back to the compositions of Gurū Nānak (1469–1539) known as the *Bābur Bāñī*, in which the Gurū, although the founder of a religious community, shows acute political awareness and concern for individual rights of innocent civilians, especially women, brutally raped and killed by Bābur's army. [1] The Gurū also critiques the ruling Lodhīs for their callousness and inability to provide an effective military response to Bābur's aggression. The engagement of Gurū Nānak with both the religious and the political leads one sixteenth-century manuscript to describe him as a *pādshāh* (ruler) who sustains both *dīn* (religion) and *duniyā* (world): *bābe nānak vedī pātīsāh dīn dunīā kī tek*. [4]

Gurū Hargobind (1595–1644), known as *mīrī-pīrī dā mālik* (the master of *mīrī-pīrī*), gave concrete expression to this concept by donning two swords, one representing *mīrī*, his political command of the Sikh community, and the other representing *pīrī*, his religious leadership. This happened during the ceremony of his installation as the sixth Gurū in 1606. The Sikh community became increasingly militarized under Gurū Hargobind. Two important texts, the *Sikhān dī Bhagat Mālā*, attributed to Bhāi Manī Singh, and *Gurbilās Chhevēn Pātshāhī*, inform us that Gurū Arjan, the predecessor and father of Gurū Hargobind, ordained the military training of his son and other Sikhs. [6, 7] In addition, there are references in the compositions of the fourth Gurū Rāmdās of the appointment of “guards to protect the town”. [1] Gurū Hargobind, therefore, institutionalized existing practices to keep the emerging Mughal aggression in check. He also founded the Akāl Takht, the Throne (*takht*) of the Timeless One (*akāl*), as an expression of his temporal power. He commanded his followers to bring him the best horses and weapons as gifts. The Gurū's successors continued to put the doctrine of *mīrī-pīrī* into practice by providing both political and religious leadership to the Sikh community. [5]

The doctrine admitting no dichotomy between the religious and the political is best reflected in Gurū Gobind Singh's (1666–1708) creation of the Khālāsā Panth in 1699. The Khālāsā was ordained to operate as a sovereign. As the *Tankhāhnāmā*, an

extant *rahitnāmā* (manual of Sikh practice) that was composed around 1700, states:

*rāj karegā khālsā, ākī rahai nā koe// khuār hoye  
sabh milaiḡ bace sarani ju hoye//*

The Khalsa shall rule and there shall be no opposition. Those in the opposition camp shall return to join [the Khalsa] after bitter frustration. [3]

This text prefigures self-governance and the conquest of territories by the Khālsā, first under the leadership of Bandā Singh Bahādur (d. 1716), followed by the Sikh *misl*s in the remainder of eighteenth century and Raṅjīt Singh (d. 1839) in the first half of the nineteenth century. The ever-present role of the Akāl Takht in articulating Sikh political demands and organizing Sikhs against the colonial and postcolonial states demonstrate the continued relevance of *mīrī-pīrī* in Sikh life. [2, 3, 5]

## References

1. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (n.d.), S.G.P.C., Amritsar
2. Bhangu RS, Dhillon BS (eds) (2004) *Sri Gur Panth* Prakash Krit Sardar Rathana Singh Bhangu. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
3. Lal BN (Cir. 1700) Tankhanama, in Gurmail Singh Collection, 9. Panjab Digital Library, SAS Nagar
4. Mann GS (2000) *The making of Sikh scripture*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
5. Harbans S (ed) (1997) *The encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Singh M (1979) *Sikkhan Di Bhagatmala: Adhiaina ata Sampadana*. Lahore Bookshop, Ludhiana
7. Vedanti JS (ed) (1998) *Gurbilas Patshahi Chevin*. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar

## Misl(s)

Harpreet Singh  
Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard  
University, Cambridge, MA, USA

## Definition

Misl is a term used to refer to major Sikh confederacies that sought to expand Sikh rule across the Panjab in the eighteenth century, leading to significant weakening of the Mughal rule across the region.

## The Sikh Confederacies

The term *misl* has been used to describe major confederacies of Sikh warriors who had acquired territories to expand Sikh rule across the Punjab, especially in the eighteenth century. The *misl* also became a means of organizing Sikh life during this period. According to Hari Ram Gupta, for participation in this political community, devotion to Gurū Gobind Singh was a central requirement, without interference from any priestly class, which was conspicuously missing from the Sikh community. [2, 3, 5, 7] Instead, the whole community, known as the *Panth*, was itself standing in covenant with God through the *Gurū Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture. [1] The term *misl* most likely originated with Gurū Gobind Singh, as it occurs in the writing of his court poet Saināpati. The poet, in the *Sri Gur Sobhā* (Splendor of the Gurū, c. 1708), uses the term in two historical contexts: First, to describe a unit of armed warriors fighting against Hindu hill chiefs in the Battle of Bhaṅgāṇī in 1688; and second, to describe groups of men who came to see Gurū Gobind Singh during his last days at Nāndēd. [6] Etymologically, the term can be traced to the Arabic *maslaḥat*, which Steingass defines as “A frontier-garrison, a fortification at the entrance into a country; armed (men), warlike (people)...”. [9] The term is also frequently translated as a “file” or “record,” – which was most likely maintained at the Akāl Takht, under the commander of the Dal Khālsā, the entire Sikh army – pertaining to a Sikh group’s fighting force and territorial acquisitions. [5, 7]

Based on texts such as Rattan Singh Bhangū’s *Sri Gurū Panth Prakāsh* (The Rise of the *Panth*, c. 1810), the Sikhs held the conviction that Gurū Gobind Singh, through divine sanction, had bestowed the sovereignty of the Panjab upon the Khālsā. [2] The Gurū, during his stay at Nanded in 1708, dispatched Bandā Singh Bahādur, along with other prominent Sikhs, to supplant Mughal power and replace it with Sikh rule. With his conquest of Sirhind, which had long served as the seat of Mughal power in the Panjab, Banda Singh struck coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh in 1710. By this time

approximately 30,000 troops had joined the Sikh general in his campaign. Sikh rule under Bandā Singh, however, did not last long. Bandā Singh was captured by Mughals in December 1715, and executed in Delhi in June 1716. [8] With the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah's declaration of a genocide campaign against the Sikhs, small *jathās* or groups of Sikhs retreated to forests to reorganize. Bhangū records an early account of *jathās* of Bārī Doāb being organized into four *tummans* or squadrons of 200 each, with a specified area of operation and agreement of mutual help when necessary. [2] These *jathās* also congregated at Amritsar twice a year, during the festivals of *Vaisākhī* and *Divālī*. During such occasions, Sikhs began convening a *Sarbatt Khālsā* (a political assembly of Sikhs) to discuss pressing issues facing the Sikh community. [4] For instance, with weakening of the Mughals and the death of the then governor of Lahore Zakarīyā Khān in 1745, a *Sarbatt Khālsā* passed a *gurmattā* (resolution) to reorganize Sikh *jathās* into 25 groups. Similarly, the *Sarbatt Khālsā* on the *Vaisākhī* day, March 29, 1748, passed a *gurmattā* to reorganize 65 bands of warriors into 11 *misls* in order to offer organized resistance to the Mughals and expand Sikh rule. Furthermore, the entire Sikh fighting force was unified as the Dal Khālsā under the command of Jassā Singh Āhlūvālīā. [2, 5, 7] Each of the following 11 *misls* was assigned its own *sardār* (chief): Ahluvālīā; Singhpurīā; Karoṣīnghīā; Nishānānvālī; Shahīd; Ḍallevālīā; Sukkarchakkīā; Bhaṅgī; Kanhaiyā; Nakaī; Rāmgharhīā. Phūlkīān *misal* under Ālā Singh is referred to as the twelfth *misal*, but it was not a member of the Dal Khālsā. In 1799, a process of unification was started by Ranjit Singh to establish the Sarkār-i Khālsā (Government of the Khālsā), an empire that effectively ended the sovereignty enjoyed by individual *misal* chiefs. [7]

## References

1. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (n.d.), S.G.P.C., Amritsar
2. Bhangu RS, Dhillon BS (eds) (2004) Sri Gur Panth Prakash Krit Sardar Ratan Bhangu. Singh Brothers, Amritsar

3. Cunninghamman JD (1849) A history of the Sikhs: from the origin of the nation to the battles of the Sutlej. John Muray, London
4. Forster G (1798) A journey from Bengal to England: through the northern part of India, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Persia, and into Russia by the Caspian-Sea. R. Faulder, London
5. Gupta HR (1997) Misls. In: Singh H (ed) The encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
6. Sainapati (1967) Sri Guru Sobha: Kavi Sainapati Racit (ed: Shamsheer Singh Ashok). Sikh History Research Board, SGPC, Amritsar
7. Singh B (1993) A history of Sikh Misals. Punjabi University, Patiala
8. Singh G (1990) Life of Banda Singh Bahadur: based on contemporary and original records. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Steingass FJ (1892) A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary, including the words and phrases to be met with in persian literature. Routledge & K. Paul, London

## Modern

- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Modernism

- [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Modernity (Sikhism)

G. S. Sahota

Department of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[Modern](#); [Modernism](#)

## Definition

Overview of the ways in which Sikh historical experience intersect with the category of modernity.



## Introduction

The relationship that Sikhism maintains with the concept of modernity as it has developed over recent decades is twofold. The break with traditional authorities that the founder of Sikhism initiated itself instantiates somewhat of an organic Indian rational civil theology, replete with salient articulations of time, agency, subjectivity, and critique, all captured in immediately intelligible vernaculars. The subsequent subjection of the Sikh community to the imperatives of British colonial rule and the contradictions of Enlightenment marked for Sikhism significant departures from its past vernacular dynamism. Having gone through a difficult, at times violent, incorporation into colonial and postcolonial dispensations, often at substantial political cost, the Sikh community today struggles to find its bearings within these two conflicting legacies of modernity.

## Reason in the Vernacular

Sikhism's genesis as a distinct practical path on the spiritual landscape of the sixteenth-century India coincided with and in many ways advanced experiments that ultimately marked significant departures from received wisdom and ancient instruction. For instance, widespread need for the renewal of intellectual foundations characterized traditional Sanskrit scholasticism over the very centuries Sikhism attained definition. For reasons that remain as yet unclear, several inherited disciplinary models (*shastras*) obsolesced by the middle of the second millennium of the common era and key intellectuals in influential sites of brahmanical learning such as Varanasi sought to establish distinctly different discursive norms, objects of inquiry, and methodological procedures in their stead. Such moves within traditional realms of learning allowed undoubtedly for unprecedented empirical richness to accrue to astronomical inquiry (*jyotish*) on account of ecumenical borrowing. In linguistics (*vyakarana*), prominent language philosophers such as Khaunda Bhatta and Nilakantha Chaturdhara adopted the "radically modernist

position" that the mundane vernacular could serve just as well as the sacred Sanskrit as a vehicle for effective truth claims. ([1], p. 31) Yet the potential of these scholastic shifts was constrained by a lasting adherence on the part of brahman pandits to a ritual *mentalité* fixed upon the ancient Vedic sacrifice. It is perhaps to the concerted effort on the part of Nanak and his followers to radically undermine such paradigmatic frames of reference in their practice and thought that a variety of fundamental breakthroughs can be attributed. Such a decisive departure from the presuppositions of Vedic ritualism, which governed questions of soteriology, social normativity, and the political imaginary, continued to inform Sikh social life well beyond the era of the living gurus and well into the late eighteenth century, especially the banning of brahmanical ritual in all collective rites in even the most ecumenical (*sanatan*) strains of the tradition. [2] Nanak expressed doubts about the salvific efficacy of Vedic ritual, yogic asceticism, and religious pilgrimage in general. These all missed what was considered essential – the immanence of the divine mediated by the power of love and caring devotion: "Though Vedas, Shastras, Smritis may be learnt by heart/Though as a yogi pilgrimages are performed, /Though worship and the six-fold rites are doubly done, /Yet not to love the Lord ensures despatch to hell". ([3], p. 30) This fundamental opposition to the brahmanical legacy eventually served to place Sikhism on a path in which it connected with widely salient economic, social, and political experiments that participated in, effected, or at the very least resembled key features of what has become known as modernity, including those which will be explored here: reason, critique, agency, commerce, and experiments with state-formation. Through a critique of the otherworldliness of competing religiosities and the crude self-interest of the workaday world – in what might be considered a general emancipation from various traditional authorities – Nanak instantiated many of these quintessentially modern qualities.

In ways parallel, yet diametrically opposed, to the striking renovations within traditional Sanskrit scholasticism, an equally classic Indic matrix of

critique of Vedic ritual and all that it entailed spiritually, socially, and politically could serve as an inexhaustible resource for the kind of rupture that early Sikhism sought to embody. Thus, like the Buddha's critique of Vedic rites and his fostering of reason as an antidote to dogma in ancient times, Nanak's overturning of the brahmanical *Weltanschauung* allowed for the radical reorientation of religious experience on several fronts at once. The amalgam of theory and practice that obtained through Nanak's struggle to radically undermine the brahmanical degradation of lived experience outside the ritual and ascetic domains and general otherworldliness, on the one hand, and to open a political horizon beyond the closely circumscribed sociality of the existing Islamic power established the foundations for an experience of time as deeply historical. Nowhere does this temporal experience attain expression more poignantly than in the third guru's dialectical figuration of the lapse of old times and the regeneration of futurity. Two images capture Guru Amar Das's understanding of the historical moment: the world in conflagration (*jagat jalanda*), on the one hand, and the maintenance of an everlasting springtime (*basant*) through honest this-worldly living, on the other. The interface of these two images pushes *kaliyuga* or the traditional "iron age" into the past and begins anew the cycle of cosmic time, but this time on a more tangible, indeed, secular plane. Whereas his notion of the world on fire is reminiscent of the Buddha's legendary Fire Sermon (Adittapariyaya Sutta), thus demonstrating Sikhism's recourse to a treasure-trove of antinomian tropes for articulating novelty, his image of an epochally regenerative springtime in *kaliyuga* knows no precedent. This new image of newness concentrates within itself the potentials of the age as well as early Sikhism's strategies to actualize them. By examining such strategies and their fruitful interactions with the times, the innovative shifts of early Sikhism come into sharper relief. ([4], pp. 48–68)

The most definitive dimension of this modernity is not exclusive to Sikhism. Various lines of Indic intellectual tradition, including early Buddhism (e.g., [5] and [6]) and Charvaka, [7] had already plied their energies to formulating the

central concept – the formation of an agential subjectivity on the grounds of reason – and this very concept would find powerful European articulations and challenges as well over the centuries of Sikhism's genesis. In northern India, an emergent antinomian critique grounded in reason could very well have been the source of the shake-up of orthodox spiritual hermeneutics and the staid disciplinary taxonomies and modes of argumentation of traditional brahmanical thought, as mentioned above in the case of the new linguistics of Khaunda and Nilakantha. In the generation preceding Nanak's, the voice of Kabir poignantly concentrated the critique of long-standing experiments with reason in the Indian tradition, including the antinomian tantric formations of *vajra* (lightning bolt) and *sahaja* (spontaneity) in the eastern Gangetic plains.

Go naked if you want,  
Put on animal skins.  
What does it matter till you see the inward Ram?  
([8], p. 50)

With such pithy imperatives and assertive interogatives, the effort was already underway in Kabir's time to produce a subject on a general scale that could form its own judgments on concrete spiritual and practical matters and no longer be hampered by the submissive acceptance of scriptural authority. The manuscript record, extending several decades after Kabir's death yet proliferating in his name, testifies to the successful, indeed popular, reception of such a critical voice. [9]

As will become evident, it was precisely through this turn inward that a rational counterpoint was discovered in subjectivity, opening forth new experiments in the long history of subject formation in India, eventuating, in the case of Sikhism, in state-formation. The question of reason – rather, the possibility of its recovery from a distorting utilitarian logic under Euro-American modernity – lies still at the heart of contemporary debates, political conflicts, and social movements at large. (cf., [10–12]) Thus, the practice of translating between India's indigenous or vernacular modernity, coined in Hindi as *deshaja adhunikata* by the prominent critic Purushottam Agrawal in his study of Kabir, [9] on the one hand, and roughly contemporaneous

and increasingly hegemonic developments of European Enlightenment, on the other, is itself at the heart of struggles seeking to forge postcolonial futures beyond currently reified divisions. Considering the stakes involved, such translation is not necessarily just a scholarly exercise. How to bring into dialogue distillations of reason stemming from such distinctly valenced vernacular contexts and such geographically separated traditions, in spite of the imperial legacy and the nationalist turn, is also to ask what expanse of reason attains clearance across cultures, regardless of the historically objective limitations and the disparity of the efforts involved. As answers to these questions inevitably touch on possibilities of collective political will, it is futurity itself that is at stake for Sikhs as much as any other social grouping of whatever scope.

Nanak's experiments with subject formation bring out the wide potentials of his mixed vernacular milieu. The significance of these experiments is best understood with respect to a large Indian legacy as well as to Nanak's contemporary social and political environment. Being privy to the socially mediating position and overarching perspective of an emergent mercantile order and taking advantage of the political insights made possible by a social context in which money-based commodity exchange ever increasingly motored the economy, Nanak realized the situation was ripening for taking fundamental precepts of the brahmanical heritage and putting them, as it were, on their head. In his articulation of an inner voice of conscience attuned to the possibilities of social harmony based in love and compassion, Nanak elaborated the lines of thought put forth by Kabir in the direction of a self-positing and self-affirming subjectivity based in rational autonomy over against received wisdom and ritualistic convention. What this amounted to was a reworking of the long-standing hieratic notion and position of the guru. For founding texts of post-Vedic or classical Hinduism, such as the Bhagavad-Gita, the fundamental teaching aimed toward the subjective internalization of sacrificial practice in the form of renunciation of worldly attachments and desires. Yet what remains is the external iconic objectivity of Krishna, for instance, as godhead symbolic of transcendent divinity.

Nanak's iconoclastic orientation and his efforts to locate transcendence within mundane immanence led to the abstraction of the guru-concept and its figuration as the internal dialogical principle which, when externalized in actual practice, undoes the hierarchical structure that characterized the received distinction between guru and disciple (*shishya*). That is, in lieu of the antinomy that characterizes the brahmanical understanding of the *guru-shishya* relationship, what Nanak offered was *guru* as a mediating concept between two embodied subjectivities attuned to self-reflexive reason and its possibilities. ([4], pp. 121–124) Through this mediating concept, the relationship between guru and disciple could be brought into generative tension, reversed, and ultimately even overcome in the practice of the collective *panth*. ([13], p. 137) In a famous yet mysterious work of early modern India, *Dabistan-e Mazahib* (The Religious Orders), ([14], pp. 59–84) in which the followers of Nanak found their distinct place, one observes how brahmanical caste hierarchies were reversed, if not completely ignored by the followers of Nanak altogether. Such a radically egalitarian reconceptualization of the guru-concept emerged as the organic outcome of experiments in subject formation that aimed all at once to undo the debilitating sociocultural logics of caste, the radical individuation of the subject in soteriological theories and practices, and the location of salvation in an absolute beyond, all of which were part and parcel of classical Hinduism. ([3], pp. xxvi–xxxiv)

The social consequences of such dialectically resonant thinking were not lost on Nanak. Indeed, the social or practical dimension of Nanak's program was often indistinguishable from its theoretical or "religious" side. In keeping with his nondualist proclivity, the practical arena – that is, immediate social and material objectivity – could be considered just another field upon which the spiritual force of the guru-concept could be corrected, widened, and enriched. And, in turn, the theoretical domain's autonomy and authentic resources could only be guaranteed by a practical dispensation that was imbued with and oriented by self-possessed contemplation (*vicar*) as its proper

telos. Here again the practical and theoretical advances involved overturning and ultimately exiting out of an ontological givenness of classical brahmanical society. Key to grasping the social shift that early Sikhism marked is the long-standing notion of ontological debt stemming from the Vedas. What Nanak did was socialize that idea and, in doing so, makes an advance toward retrieving the rational kernel within the Vedic presupposition of indebtedness to the gods. This occurred most powerfully through a sharp critique of egoistic selfhood (*haumai, man-mukh*) and all of its essential illusoriness through the reconfiguration of the indebtedness of that self to the larger social collectivity upon which it truly depended, materially as well as symbolically. The critique of egoistic behavior, often at the center of Hindu salvific practice, led to the innovation of institutions such as the communal kitchen and other forms of direct service to the wider community, regardless of caste, ethnicity, or confessional background. These practices not only undermined the ground of Hindu salvific practice, oriented generally on the individual self, but the social hierarchies and the taboos that they maintained. In this fashion, one can see that an ancient idiom of indebtedness was modulated in the vernacular into a vehicle for expressing a critique of socially necessary ego-illusion in the dynamism of a money-mediated regime of accumulation.

The consciousness of this kind of social debt is expressed in a language that indexes radically the underlying depths of the societal transformation underway in Nanak's time. The social dispensation that arises through following "[t]he all-wise Being who is Nanak's inner guide," which is how "guru" is understood in the Guru-Granth, ([3], p. 28) is one that mitigates the irrational ego of market self-interest as well as the typically individuated soteriological aims of the otherworldly *sannyasi* or yogi in Indic traditions. ([15], pp. 135–138) Salvific efficacy is only to be found in the guru's word or name, which together serve as a cure for the illness of ego in mediating general social unity and the self-awareness of that unity. As Christopher Shackle and Arvind-Pal Mandair note, the cure to ego involves a radical

socialization of the long-standing spiritual battle with the "five enemies" of lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego, all of which mistakenly restrict the general subject of money-mediated social collectivity within the privative confines of an individually embodied phenomenology. Shackle and Mandair further observe that "[t]his is not a battle *against* the world but a battle to exist-in-the-world as radically interconnected to others" ([3], p. 42) and that in the last instance, "liberation from ego involves a realization that our singularity is punctured by the presence of other existent beings (not simply human beings), a fact which opens the possibility for an ethics and politics based on mind that is ever in a state of balance (*sahaj*)". ([3], p. 42) How far this interlocking set of ideas has departed from the framework of the brahmanical paradigm may be noted by reviewing the keen insights of the French indologist Charles Malamoud on the theology of debt that characterized orthodox thought and ritual. As Malamoud notes, canonical guides to Vedic ritual assert that "[w]hoever exists is born (as) debt. Man is not simply affected by debt, he is defined by it," as in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, or these ritual manuals take for granted that the human condition is "indebted," *rnavan*, as does the *Taittiriya Samhita*. Malamoud conjectures that the etymological obscurity surrounding the term "*rna*" may simply be due to the fact that "[i]n Sanskrit. . .the notion of debt is primary and autonomous, and does not allow a further analysis". ([16], p. 95) Nanak's program was nothing less than a re-grounding of such an axiomatic condition upon its proper social plane, a move made possible in all likelihood by the new social developments, and the privileged vantage point of the merchant order with respect to them. In this way, early Sikhism is expressive of a vernacular reason breaking with classical traditions and finding fertile territory upon a dynamic field of commercial activity and political possibility. Such a field was relatively agreeable for the unfolding of early Sikhism's rational civil theology. [15] Sikhism thus pointed to the possibilities of spontaneous collective growth that led beyond the confines of religious dogmatism and its practical normativity.

## Colonial Contradictions of Enlightenment

Nanak's followers are described in the famous *Dabistan-e Mazahib* in the seventeenth century as "abstemious, soft-spoken, men of ecstatic delight in the contemplation of God" whose "essential worship consists in the study of their *murshid*'s verses which they also recite melodiously in pleasing tunes, using musical instruments." In the eyes of these Nanak-panthis notes the mysterious author of the *Dabistan*, "kinsmen and strangers, friends and foes, are all alike," and that much of their orientation is toward the other as a way to experience the self in God: "In their *murshid*'s name, which is constantly on their lips, they serve the wayfarers, regarding it a way of worshipping God". ([17], pp. 24–25) Such descriptions may strike one as befitting an ecumenical social order that wished to embody the wide-reaching rational ethic that emerged organically with the emergent market-mediated sociality of the early modern world. Yet such accounts do raise questions as to how such a quiescent civil-rational body within the Mughal imperium got transformed into a besieged political community fighting for autonomy against the eroding Mughal powers as well as an encroaching British imperial presence. How, in other words, did Sikhism go from being a critique of one-sided or otherworldly religiosity and its practical overturning into an instantiation of religion in its generally reified, that is, affirmative form? While the conditions under which a structural transformation of the religious sphere took place in India were modern, that is, in the metropolitan sense, it must be understood that the colonial mediation of metropolitan hegemony meant a significant departure for Sikhism from the vernacular modernity of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Shackle has described this as a "shift from previous Indic patterns of highly permeable community boundaries to the operations of Western 'either/or' notions". ([18], p. 75) In an analysis of Sikh reformers' response to Ernst Trumpp's controversial translation of the Guru-Granth into English for colonial authorities, Mandair sees an equivalence being struck between the colonial idiom and

indigenous concepts. Mandair understands the consequence of "imposing structures of transcendence into the exegesis of Sikh scripture" as a process of "de-ontologization". ([19], p. 30) For Harjot Oberoi, the construction of Sikhism's boundaries in the colonial period hinged upon the adoption of a notion of religion "as a systematized sociological unit claiming unbridled loyalty from its adherents and opposing an amorphous religious imagination" at distinct levels of the colonial order. ([20], p. 17) While a full reconstruction of the history that brought about these transformations is beyond the scope of this entry, the particular historical logic by which the imposition (or dialectic) of "Enlightenment" in the colony led to the undoing of Sikhism's vernacular modernity must be specified. An analysis of Sikhism's struggle for dignity, autonomy, and power within the crucible of the state since early modernity can bring to light how participation within the spiritual field inevitably involved encounters with secular authorities and worldly necessity. What must be traced is the way Sikh spiritual and political action within the structures of the modern state brought transformations and innovations into the spiritual field itself – what must be traced, in other words, is the reflexive impact that encounters with the categories of the state produced, and the kinds of predicaments the pre-political spiritual inheritance of Sikhism has experienced on account of such transformations. It has become unclear how one ought to keep to the word of the gurus just when the imperative to maintain fidelity to such alternative traditions of modernity becomes all the more acute.

It is likely that the institutional form that Sikhism adopted from the period of Nanak's Kartarpur commune came to partake in striking ways in the widespread state-like innovations of the early modern period. Distinguishing itself from a wide amalgam of spiritual systems through regular practices and collective cultivation of the guru's message, Nanak's path ultimately evolved into an autonomous institution that was upheld by the successive custodianship of nine gurus, culminating in a radical break with Mughal authority and the forging of an independent polity in early eighteenth-century Punjab. The fact that an



institutional pattern slowly took hold from the days of the founding guru and could evolve despite the changing of the guard and the shifting relations between the emergent institutions of Sikhism, on the one hand, and the stronger and much vaster Mughal empire, on the other, attests to the stabilization and quasi-impersonal regularization of state-like structures during these centuries. These structures may themselves be seen as the product of all the contests for power within the vicissitudes of Mughal imperial authority: if one wanted to assert political control, one must hold together the institutions of government and means of coercion and be able to organize and preserve order among political communities in such way as to claim the loyalty of subjects in times of crisis. [21] It is just these criteria that the founding of the Khalsa dramatically fulfills in 1699.

Yet the politicization of Sikhism can be thought of as having begun at least a century earlier when, in 1598, the Mughal emperor Akbar crossed the River Beas to visit Guru Arjan. “The fresh luster” that the house of Guru Arjan received “through His Majesty alighting there” meant that the growing social and political influence of Sikh institutions, especially their capacity to collect revenue, would no longer be politically negligible for the Mughals. ([14], p. 55) From this initial contact with a dominant state-formation, Sikhism was destined to work out its spiritual inheritance through ever more sharply defined political and social forms. The strategies that Sikhs took up were in part determined by the strengths and weaknesses of the Mughal state, but what needs special attention is the way such outwardly focused strategies redounded back into the Sikh fold, how, in other words, the forms of Mughal and wider Islamic political practices, such as capital punishment (*siyasat*) and martyrdom (*shahidat*), got reflected into Sikh selfhood. With the martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 and the transfer of custodianship of the Sikhs to his son Hargobind, the community began developing its political resources to protect itself from further persecution under the Mughals. Guru Hargobind came of age cultivating the temporal dimensions immanent to Sikhism from the time of Nanak, especially the idea of living-in-death as the

substance of ethical existence and the ecstatic forms of subjectivity meant to breakdown dualisms of self and other or life and death. To the sword of spirituality, Hargobind combined the sword of political power; to the serene other-worldliness of the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, he erected the Akal Takht for organizing this-worldly affairs; and alongside revenue in coin and kind, he called for armed men ready to test their valor against a formidable enemy. The process of politicization would continue through the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and culminate in the founding of the Khalsa in 1699 under Guru Gobind and the articulation of a Sikh state over the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. The elaboration of an autonomous Sikh polity involved the adaptation of Perso-Islamic and classically Indic forms of legitimation and governance. Though much of the administrative structure of the Mughals was incorporated into the Sikh state such as that of Ranjit Singh, the ruling elite was highly composite. And though “Sikhs were represented in a larger proportion in the civil administration and the army than the individuals belonging to other religious communities, . . . there was no discrimination in principle”. ([22], pp. 91–92) In her recent account of military mobilization under the Khalsa banner in eighteenth-century Punjab, Purnima Dhavan observes that the “mobility of the military labor that Sikh peasants offered to Khalsa armies and their insistence on respectful treatment as fellow Sikhs meant that Khalsa armies could never function in the more hierarchical fashion of Mughal regiments or the Rajput forces of the period”. ([23], p. 10) Such innovative transformations of existing institutions suggest that the idea of Sikhism as an alternative (*tisar panth*) to Hindu and Islamic legacies was neither accidental nor merely imaginary over the slow fragmentation of the Mughal empire. The institutional developments help explain the relative ease by which Ranjit Singh was able to reorganize his military forces along modern European lines and prolong his independence before an advancing British empire.

Whereas the Mughal state served as a catalyst for Sikhism’s evolution as a political phenomenon and eventually a state-formation autonomous

enough to elaborate its spiritual reason, the experience under colonial and postcolonial regimes in the subcontinent and beyond has ultimately posed several challenges to the possibility of extending the very vernacular modernity early Sikhism cultivated. The colonial side of metropolitan modernity was visited upon the subcontinent through the agency initially of the East India Company. Over-taking the remaining Sikh state left by Ranjit Singh in the Punjab in 1849, British rule was further consolidated with the liquidation of the East India Company and the establishment of crown rule after the Mutiny of 1857. As Prakash Tandon's family memoir *Punjabi Century* details, colonial state power worked its way deeply into social and cultural life, in ways intended and unintended, ultimately bequeathing to the new nation states of India and Pakistan, a political state apparatus able to interfere bureaucratically in matters such as love and marriage, matters which in recent memory had been left to the adjudication of smaller, more local, and improvisational political bodies. [24] The penetration of metropolitan capitalist social relations into the colonial hinterland, into domestic space, into the fabric of religious communities, and into spiritual practices themselves was slow, uneven, and yet could have jolting effects. To grasp what kinds of potentials lay implicit within colonial modernity, what sorts of reversals of metropolitan Enlightenment were unfolding in the colonial realm, it is important to hold together both the social and political dynamics India's incorporation into the world market was producing, on the one hand, and the styles of colonial governance meant to manage and control these very dynamics, on the other. The contradictions that characterized colonial rule were often the very contradictions through which different religious communities in India found themselves. In the Sikh context, this meant entering into a contest with British domination all the while appropriating and adapting the reigning categories and modalities of colonial power.

The British annexation of Punjab provoked the last assertion of vernacular Sikh sovereignty in the seditious activity of Namdhari Sikhs. The quick and brutal suppression of the Namdhari

movement in 1872 established firmly the ground for the direct interface of Sikhism with the modality of metropolitan Enlightenment. ([25], pp. 127–135; [26], pp. 90–95) Enlightenment in colonial Punjab took hold in a myriad ways, and its power was evident as much through scientific mastery as through military might, as much through new media as through the new ways of imagining and constructing the world that they facilitated. As Bernard Cohn observed in his seminal work on the colonial census, the bureaucratic categories the colonial power deployed for its governmental purposes transformed decisively the manner in which Indian subjects imagined themselves, their methods of political mobilization, and the agendas that they now pursued. ([27], cf. [28]) Enlightenment asserted itself in the colonial milieu by making virtually mandatory engagement with the technologies, terms, and methods imported or developed by the colonial power. The new terrain of political conflict that these generated brought out new contradictions: the Singh Sabha and the Tat Khalsa, two organizations that competed to return Sikhism to its putative original purity were doing so in the ill-conducive media of the new milieu, and the scientific procedures that these organizations' intellectual leaders promoted threatened to problematize the very origins that they wished to secure for their faith, including received wisdom about the provenance of scripture. ([18], pp. 76–78; cf. [22], pp. 261–286) The new practices departed from the old as much as telegraph adopted by the agencies of Sikh reformism differed from the small army of foot messengers that the Namdharis had employed as recently as a couple of decades earlier to spread the prophecy of a return of Sikh sovereignty. That sovereignty and whatever historical logic it embodied was curtailed and rendered virtually irremediable by the colonial dispensation.

The most transformative and lasting impact that the colonial milieu had on Sikhism's political inheritance can best be illustrated through an analysis of the implications of the colonial census. The colonial officials' claim to merely mirror the Indian reality that stood alien before them in the

categories of the census disavowed modernity's propensity toward domination and the reduction of the world's manifold diversity into manageable units through useful classificatory schemes. (cf. [12], pp. 1–34, 137–172) The perpetuation of census claims to simply reflect what was given equally disavowed the transformative effect that the census information and the wider governmental apparatus would have on Indian subjects themselves. Key in this respect was the manner in which religious categories were deployed: mutually alienating, they rent asunder long-standing traditions of intercommunal borrowing; abstracting, they concretized the force of Western conceptions of religious being by making each community have to conjure from within, and even invent if necessary, the discursive, practical, communal, and institutional norms of its Western counterparts to qualify as a politically applicable religion; ([29], pp. 1–18) politicizing, the census categories pitted one community against the other, providing measures for the institutional clout of one at the potential cost of the other. The unintended result of these zero-sum games of communal politics in late colonial India was often the emptying of the spiritual content of these traditions or, what may simply be another way of saying the same thing, rendering such content virtually indistinguishable from the political agendas of the competing communities. And thus, the dual impact of colonial power obtains: internally, the agents of religious reform had to make their traditions commensurate as much as possible with the classificatory schemes imposed from without, and this could happen at the cost of the valences and potentialities of these traditions which remained stubbornly incongruent to the presuppositions of colonial modernity (such as the rational-critical dimensions of Sikhism); externally, once religion was inseparable from political calculation, reformers risked instrumentalizing the very spiritual inheritance that had shunned or turned away from such worldly utilitarianism, and thus betraying exactly what they purported to stand for.

The predicament in which the colonial dispensation delivered the Sikh community was

that of an official minority everywhere they are to be found today, with all of the political disadvantage that this status entails. The precariousness of being vulnerable to an often hostile majority population has been matched only by the inability to secure autonomous spaces for recovering precolonial legacies and allowing the sociopolitical dimensions immanent in those legacies to attain expression within the evolving contexts. Endeavors along these lines have proven politically and spiritually fraught, whether at the level of establishing an autonomous Sikh state in the subcontinent or at the level of securing rights as a religious group in diasporic contexts.

## Cross-References

- [Colonialism](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Pollock S (2011) The languages of science in early modern India. In: Pollock S (ed) *Forms of knowledge in early modern Asia: explorations in the intellectual history of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*. Duke University Press, Durham
2. Singh R (2006) In: McLeod WH (ed) *Prem Sumarag: the testimony of a Sanatan Sikh*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
3. Mandair A, Shackle C (eds) (2005) *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Sikh scriptures*. Routledge, London
4. Grewal JS (2011) *Four centuries of Sikh tradition: history, literature, and identity*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
5. Collins S (1998) *Nirvana and other Buddhist felicities: utopias of the Pali imaginaire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK
6. Kapstein MT (2003) *Reason's traces: identity and interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thought*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
7. Bhattacharya R (2011) *Studies on the Carvaka/Lokayata*. Anthem Press, London
8. Hawley JS, Juergensmeyer M (trans) (2008) *Songs of the Saints of India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
9. Agrawal P (2009) *Akath Kahani Prem ki: Kabir ki Kavita aur unka Samay (Story of a love ineffable:*

- Kabir's poetry and his times). Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi
10. Hoy DC, McCarthy T (1994) *Critical theory*. Blackwell, Oxford
  11. Habermas J (1991) *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (trans: Burger T). Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, MA
  12. Adorno TW, Horkheimer M (2002) *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments* (trans: Jephcott E). Stanford University Press, Stanford
  13. Uberoi JPS (1996) *Religion, civil society, and the state: a study of Sikhism*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  14. Grewal JS, Habib I (eds) (2001) *Sikh history from Persian sources: translations of major texts*. Tulika, New Delhi
  15. Sahota GS (2011) Guru Nanak and rational civil theology. *Sikh Form* 7(2):131–143
  16. Malamoud C (1998) *Cooking the world: ritual and thought in Ancient India* (trans: White D). Oxford University Press, Delhi
  17. Grewal JS, Bal SS (1967) *Guru Gobind Singh: a biographical study*. Panjab University Publications Bureau, Chandigarh
  18. Shackle C (2002) Sikhism. In: Woodhead L (ed) *Religions in the modern world: traditions and transformations*. Routledge, London, pp 70–85
  19. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the West: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York
  20. Oberoi H (1997) *The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  21. Skinner Q (1989) The state. In: Ball T, Farr J, Hanson RL (eds) *Political innovation and conceptual change*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, pp 90–131
  22. Grewal JS (2009) *The Sikhs: ideology, institutions, and identity*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  23. Dhavan P (2011) *When sparrows became hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699–1799*. Oxford University Press, New York
  24. Tandon P (1961) *Punjabi century 1857–1947*. University of California Press, Berkeley
  25. Singh K (1999) *A history of the Sikhs*, vol 2: 1839–1988. Oxford University Press, Delhi
  26. Jones KW (1989) *Socio-religious reform movements in British India*, vol III.1, *The new Cambridge history of India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
  27. Cohn BS (1987) *The census, social structure and objectification in South Asia*. In: *An anthropologist among the historians and other essays*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 224–254
  28. Jones KW (1981) *Religious identity and the Indian census*. In: Barrier NG (ed) *The census in British India: new perspectives*. Manohar, Delhi, pp 73–101
  29. Lincoln B (2003) *Holy terrors: thinking about religion after September 11*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago

---

## Moksha

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Mughal/Sikh Relations

- [Sikhs and Empire](#)

---

## Music

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Music (Sikh Popular and Religious)

Nirinjan Khalsa

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, USA

---

## Synonyms

[Dhadi Var](#); [Desi and Margi](#); [Gurbani Kirtan](#); [Gurmat Sangeet](#); [Kirtan](#); [Shabad Kirtan](#)

---

## Definition

Music is performed for Sikh devotion. This aesthetically emotive medium maintains Sikh memory and identity and invokes spiritual experience within the Sikh panth. Sikh “religious” music has been influenced by “popular” musicality due to changing patronage, pedagogy, and modern technology.

---

## Music and the Divine

Music has always played an important role in people's lives whether it is for celebration, commemoration, love, or devotion. Specifically

Indian music has historically been viewed as a devotional practice that connects the individual worshiper to the *Divine Other* (an experience transgressing the ego-self). Sikh music upholds the Indian soteriological ideology that links musical aesthetics to spiritual attainment. Guru Nanak (b. 1469), the first Sikh *Guru* (spiritual teacher-leader), passed on his mystical revelations through the emotive and experiential medium of song, a continuation of the *bhakti* mystical tradition which favors music as an expression of loving devotion to the Divine Other. Guru Nanak, like his *bhakti* predecessors, promoted the idea that individual and spiritual sovereignty is not dependent on external authorities but rather can be found through a different kind of relationship brought about through a deep inner practice which includes the singing of divine hymns. Sikhs maintain that the practice of reciting and singing poetic *bani* (hymns) in *raga* (melodic measure) and *taal* (rhythmic pattern) creates an experience in the *man* (mind, ego, self) through a *rasa* (emotive) medium that is not grounded in the conceptuality of language. [12] In other words musical aesthetics with a spiritual aim invoke a spiritual experience within the practitioner and listener. Guru Nanak therefore encouraged his *Sikhs* (lit. learners) to engage in these evocative modes of expression.

The practice of singing the *Guru's bani* was continued by succeeding Sikh Gurus and then given a further authoritative structure within the Sikh community by the fifth Sikh Guru. In 1604 Guru Arjan (b. 1563) compiled the mystical-poetic songs of his *Guru* predecessors along with other saint poets into the *Adi Granth* (Primal Scripture), which he organized according to *raga* melody. Guru Arjan chose to include authors whose poetry expressed a commonality of mystical experience. The poetic themes inherent in the *bani* illustrate the transience of the ego-self caught in the mundane realm while extolling the virtues of constantly remembering the *Nam* (often referred to as "Name," *Nam* is the experience of the Divine Other which resists naming). The Gurus promoted the practice of remembrance on that which is other than the self, allowing for a transformation of the limited human ego. [12]

Guru Nanak refers to this experience as *Ik OangKar*, an expansive understanding of the unitary nature of Reality, a Oneness of consciousness free of temporal constraints.

Sikh music therefore is directly linked to a spiritual-aesthetic experience of the Divine Other. It is expressed by Bhai Gurdas (b. 1551, nephew of the third Sikh *Guru* and respected scholar who penned the *Adi Granth* for *Guru Arjan*) in his *Var* (ballad) about the "Performance of Sikh life." He states, "Music, for a Sikh of the *Guru*, is the continuously flowing ambrosial hymns (*Amrit Bani*)" (*Gur Sikhee Daa Gaavanaa Anmrit Baanee Nijharu Jharanaa*, *Var* 28, *Pauri* 10, *Line* 2). [16] In this way the essential aspect of music in Sikh practice maintains a spiritual-aesthetic connecting the Sikh to the *Guru* through the continuous singing of the *bani*.

Historically, Indian musical discourse has equated divine experience with the evocation of spiritual *rasa* through the musical mastery of *raga* and *taal*. However, the aesthetic values attributed to devotional music have inevitably changed over time due to various social, cultural, and political factors, which in turn have influenced the music's propagation and experiential reception. With historical change come new discursive and ideological apparatuses to define the evolving cultural sphere. Indian popular and devotional musical genres have historically been defined by the intent and aesthetics of the music to bring about a particular experiential *rasa* effect. However, due to changing modes of pedagogy and patronage, the lines between popular aesthetics used for entertainment purposes and classical aesthetics used for devotional practices began to blur. Sikh music has not been exempt from this interaction. Spiritual musical aesthetics were initially used by the Gurus for divine experience and mystical expression. However, due to sociopolitical factors, Sikh devotional music has seen the integration of popular musical aesthetics to appeal to the public as its patron.

### From Bhakti to Guru Nanak Bani

India has an age-old convention that associates music with an expression of the Divine. Dating back to the Vedic period (sixth century B.C.),



sound or *naad* was equated with the Ultimate Reality of *Brahman*. The Vedas themselves were ritually chanted and orally transmitted as *sruti* (eternal sound substances). Over time, music became a part of ritual devotion throughout the various regional traditions and was viewed by the bhakti traditions as the path to communion with the Divine. The term *bhakti* stems from the verb root *bhaj*, which can be translated as *to partake* or *to love* emphasizing the devotees' loving relationship to their "object" of affection. [19] This "object" is either the *nirgun* (formless/without qualities) or *sargun* (formed/with qualities) aspect of the Divine. The bhakti mode of worship and communion through singing the praises of the Divine in classical Indian musical modes allows the practitioners to experience a merging of *shabad* (word) with raga to create an emotive rasa experience. Here the individual self merges with the Divine through loving devotion. The *dhrupad* musical genre is often equated with bhakti devotion because in this musical genre the bani is given primacy over musical elements. Though it is commonly considered a "classical" tradition equated with the *darbari* royal courts, its prototype can be seen in the fourteenth-century Vaishnava bhakti temple tradition of Northern India with its four-part musical structure of *asthai*, *antra*, *sanchari*, and *abogh*. In the late fifteenth century, Guru Nanak then reformed bhakti devotional practice for his Sikhs when he sang *Gurbani Kirtan* (singing the Guru's hymns) in the *dhrupad* and folk genres.

Guru Nanak had an enlightening experience around the age of 30 that was expressed through poetic prose in the seminal Sikh prayer *Jappi Sahib*, which opens with the statement "*Ik Oangkar*." *Ik* is the numeral one which represents absolute Oneness as pure interiority without form or qualities, *nirgun*, while at the same time being *Oangkar*, the manifestation of creation as all form or qualities, *sargun*. [12] With the simple yet profound expression of *Ik Oangkar*, Guru Nanak unified two seemingly contradictory notions of the Divine. Bhai Gurdas notes Guru Nanak's reformative approach; "He preached in this dark age (*kaliyug*) that, *sargun* (*Brahm*) and *nirgun* (*Parbrahm*) are the same and identical"

(*Parbrahamu Puran Brahamu Kalijugi Andari Iku Dikhaia*. Var 1 Pauri 23). [16] Guru Nanak promoted the understanding that *nirgun bhakti* (the mystical loving relationship between the self and the formless Divine) and *sargun bhakti* (loving devotion to the many manifestations of the Divine) were both devotional methods to access the manifold aspects of the Divine that at the same time is One and All.

Guru Nanak expressed the virtues of the oneness of creation and the experience of merger with that One through devotional singing of Gurbani Kirtan. Gurbani Kirtan continues to be an important part of Sikh practice and is the primary form of Sikh music. *Gurbani* incorporates two words, *Guru* and *Bani* (poetic utterance). The term *Guru* stems from the roots *gu* (darkness) and *ru* (light) and refers to a teacher that can bring the disciple from darkness (non-knowledge) to light (knowledge). *Kirtan*, commonly referred to as singing, is formed from the roots *kirti* (praise), and *rattan/rat* (to dye) and *tan* (the body). [15] Thus, the definition of Gurbani Kirtan is rooted in the bhakti practice of singing the poetic utterances of the enlightened ones, which dyes the body in loving praise of the Divine. [15] This concept is expressed by Guru Arjan in Raga Maru; "The pleasures of maya (illusion) fade away in an instant, as the shade of a passing cloud. The ones alone who, along with the Guru, sing the Praises of the Creator Beloved are dyed in deep red (Love)". ([17], p. 1003) Gurbani Kirtan therefore was developed by the Gurus as a methodology to identify with the Divine Other through loving devotion. It was treated by the Gurus as an art form where musical aesthetics were intimately connected to the ideology of music as an expression of and way to commune with the Divine.

At the root of Gurbani Kirtan consists the understanding that singing allows one to better express the bani's poetic prose, pregnant with meaning, by evoking its feeling through specific ragas. Guru Nanak's shabads (compositions) sung in the emotive raga melodic mode express the ineffability or inability of language alone to convey the experience of that One. "What words can we speak to evoke Love? In the ambrosial hours before dawn (Amrit Vela) chant the Nam, and

### Music (Sikh Popular and Religious),

**Image 1** Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana (Photo taken by author at Jawaddi Kalan, Ludhiana)



contemplate its Greatness. . . O Nanak, sing the praises of the [Divine] Treasure. Sing, and listen, and let your mind (*man*) be filled with love. Your pain will be sent far away, and peace will come to your home". ([17], p. 2)

In the nirgun bhakti vein, Guru Nanak's philosophy stresses the importance of the act of loving remembrance of the One rather than attachment to an external object. Guru Nanak urged his disciples to practice Gurbani Kirtan and *Nam Simran* (remembrance of the Nam). The purpose for meditation on the Nam is that it becomes spontaneous loving devotion on the Divine Other, letting go of the human attachment to the ego in order to experience a merger with the Divine. [12] Guru Nanak's Sikhs (lit. learners) continued these transformative practices both as a means of worship as well as tools to enlightened consciousness.

### Blurring Boundaries Between the Temporal and Spiritual

Guru Nanak penned his 973 hymns, sung in 19 raga melodies into *pothi* books. In 1539 he passed on his pothis to his successor Guru Angad (b. 1504). [13] This practice was continued from Guru to successor through the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, who in 1604 compiled these hymns, along

with those of selected Hindu and Muslim saints and mystics from the bhakti and sant traditions, into the *Adi Granth* (Primal Book). [13] In total, the *Adi Granth* has 36 authors, 7 of which are Sikh Gurus; 15 are sant and bhakti saint poets from various creeds and casts, notably Sheikh Farid, Namdev, Kabir, and Ravidas; 11 are poets of the Guru's court; and three are devoted disciples of the Guru including Bhai Mardana (Guru Nanak's Muslim *rababi* (rabab playing) companion) [13] (Image 1).

The diversity of the *Adi Granth's* authorship illustrates the notion of equality inherent in Sikh ideology which started with Guru Nanak and continued through Guru Arjan, who chose which banis to include in the scripture based on their mystical insight and ideological content. Although there were many saints from whose poetry Guru Arjan could have chosen, he included those banis whose philosophical perspective was consistent with the Sikh Gurus. A commonality found in the banis enshrined in the Granth is that they take temporal realities such as life, death, longing, and love and metaphorically utilize them to symbolize the process of spiritual attainment. The mystical path is one that promotes the notion that sovereignty comes from a personal relationship between the self and Divine Other.

In other words, the Sikh Gurus and the saint poets realized that the authority to express the state of spiritual attainment comes from an aesthetic experience where the transient-temporal self finds a new mode of expression that is not caught in the circularity of auto-affection (of redefining the ego and naming the self) but instead merges the ego-self with the Nam. [5]

The unifying nature of Gurbani started with Guru Nanak, was continued by Guru Arjan with the creation of the *Adi Granth*, and was then bestowed a sovereign identity by the tenth Guru. In 1708 Guru Gobind Singh appointed the *Adi Granth* as the final and enduring Sikh Guru. No longer was the authority of the guruship to be invested in a person but instead in the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* (Gurbani enshrined in the Scripture (Adi Granth) as Guru). The act of completely and irrevocably removing the guruship from any human authority and placing it in the musico-poetic bani clearly represents the goal of Sikh devotional practice, which is to actively imbibe the Gurbani in order to transform one's subjectivity from an ego-centered *manmukh* to a Guru-centered *gurmukh* for Divine Union.

The notion of a sovereign Sikh identity being one which is focused on the Divine and accessed through aesthetic mediums evolved with the sixth Guru. Guru Hargobind (b. 1595) became the Guru after the martyrdom of his father Guru Arjan in 1606 at the hands of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. He advanced the Gurus' sociopolitical message of equality and personal sovereignty through embodying the *sant-sipahi* (saintly warrior) ideal by wearing garb previously only worn by royalty and donning two swords representing the Sikh's *miri* (political) and *piri* (spiritual) sovereignty, removed from Mughal rule. Guru Hargobind further promoted Sikh's political and spiritual authority through the construction of the *Akal Takht* (lit. Timeless Throne) which is the political seat of Sikh authority built facing the spiritual seat of authority, the Harimandir Sahib, in Amritsar, India. While devotional Gurbani Kirtan was being sung within the Harimandir Sahib, Guru Hargobind employed a new form of musical expression at the Akal Takht with the *dhadi* (epic ballad poetry) genre to celebrate and

commemorate Sikh heroism and sacrifice. The term *dhadi* was originally used as a self-referential title by Guru Nanak who, as a sociopolitical statement on caste and creed, referred to himself as a *dhadi* (low-cast Muslim minstrel) of the *Satguru* (True Guru). [7] Sikh, *dhadis* (balladeers) attribute their lineage to Guru Hargobind and have continued the ritual of singing at the Akal Takht as performative agents whose eulogies and panegyrics sung in the heroic *vir* rasa aesthetic enliven the *miri-piri* concept within the shared memory of Sikh experience [7] (Image 2).

The promotion of Sikh political and spiritual sovereignty is further evidenced in Sikh music, both through Gurbani Kirtan and *dhadi* Vars. There are 22 Vars in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, many of which are heroic in nature and attributed to *dhadi* bards. [7] Most *dhadi* ballads are not considered a part of Gurbani Kirtan which is defined by the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (code of conduct) as including the bani from the *Guru Granth Sahib* as well as that of Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Nand Lal, and the tenth Guru's *Dasam Granth* (Scriptural Book). [9] Still the Vars found in the *Guru Granth Sahib* are sung by the *dhadis* illustrating a consistency of thought within Sikh practice and expressed through Sikh music. Yet another example of how the Gurus elevate the temporal to the spiritual realms to support the notion of Sikh sovereignty is referenced by the Gurbani Kirtan *parampara* (heritage), which attributes the creation of the *taus* (lit. peacock, stringed instrument used in classic Gurbani Kirtan) to Guru Hargobind (Image 3). It is said that Guru Hargobind appropriated this image, a symbol of Mughal authority, to illustrate Sikh spiritual and political sovereignty by designing the peacock-shaped *taus* as a response to the *takht-e taus* (peacock throne) of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (who ruled oppressively after the death of his father Jahangir in 1627). Once again, the Sikh Gurus transformed symbols of temporal authority through musical aesthetics to invoke spiritual experience and sovereign identity within the Sikh panth (Image 4).

Guru Gobind Singh, like his predecessors, continued to promote Sikh sovereignty. In 1699 he gave a permanent form to the *sant-sipahi* Sikh

### Music (Sikh Popular and Religious),

**Image 2** Dhadis performing at the Akal Takhat (Photo taken by author 2011)



**Music (Sikh Popular and Religious), Image 3** Thirteenth-generation Sikh musician Bhai Baldeep Singh playing the taus which he handcrafted (photo courtesy of Bhai Baldeep Singh)

ideal through dress and conduct, with the creation of the *Khalsa* (lit. pure) brotherhood of Sikh initiates, whose naming reappropriates the term *khalisah* referring to that which is under direct authority and control of the Mughal Empire. Guru Gobind Singh developed the miri-piri concept within the Khalsa panth through the patronage of dhadi musicians who engendered the vir rasa heroic aesthetic enshrined in the Dasam Granth. [7] The miri-piri ideology espoused by the Sikh Gurus and expressed through the emotive musico-poetic aesthetic blurs the boundaries between the temporal-political and spiritual-mystical realms. In this way, musical aesthetics merge the temporal with the Divine for an experience of the unitary nature of the Ultimate Reality.

### Aesthetically Constructing “Religious” and “Popular” Music

Indian musical aesthetics maintain a shared cultural notion which links musical praxis to divine attainment. [7] This was recorded in the sixth century BC with the Vedic notion that the Brahman god figurehead could be realized through naad and the divine shabad of AUM(OM) (Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.2-4). The concept of a vocalized sound being equated with Brahman



### Music (Sikh Popular and Religious),

**Image 4** Guru Hargobind and Ragi musicians painted on the wall of the Akal Takht (Photo taken from Jawaddi Kala Archival Library)



is further developed in the eighth century CE when Matanga's *Brhaddesi* gives the earliest exposition of the concept of *naada-brahman* as the sonic foundation not only of music but of the Ultimate Reality (Brahman). [10] Another important work in the history of India's musical ideology is Bharata's *Natyashastra* 200 C.E. which provides the earliest treatise on the aesthetic relationship between raga and rasa and was further expanded by Abhinavagupta's eleventh-century commentary which equated the rasa experience to a transcendental state of aesthetic rapture. [10]

Connecting a specific notion of musical aesthetics with divine experience was continued by both bhakti and Sikh praxis (practice) with emphasis on evoking an experience of the Divine Nam through simran and kirtan. The Gurbani of the saint poets all emphasize a mystical notion of individual sovereignty where personal liberation is found through the development of an individual's inner realm rather than through external rituals performed without meditative consciousness. In Gurbani Kirtan it is the *chitt* (meditative consciousness) which must be present to evoke the shabad along with the musical mastery of raga and taal. As expressed in the bani of the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das (b. 1534), "Amongst all *raga* and *naad*, those are sublime, O brother, which enables

the mind (man) to be in a constant state of remembrance [of the Divine], that raga and naad are true and their price cannot be said". ([17], p. 1423) In other words, the Gurus promote those musical aesthetics that evoke a spiritual rasa and enable remembrance on the Nam.

The notion of rasa has both effectively and affectively come to constitute the emotive experience with the transformative potential to transgress from the mundane to the esoteric realms. In this way the difference between various styles of music is the mental state or intention of the singer and the raga chosen for a particular experience. Therefore the intention of the music is what distinguishes it as a spiritual genre. A *shant rasa* (peaceful feeling) is often used to evoke an esoteric experience as opposed to the use of *kam rasa* (feeling of desire or enjoyment) for entertainment purposes.

Abhinavagupta's eleventh-century commentary on the *Natyashastra* links rasa to divine experience, a concept which distinguishes between *gandharva* (ritual) music performed for spiritual benefit and *gana* (entertainment) music for enjoyment. [11] Sarngadeva's thirteenth-century musical treatise, the *Sangitaratnakara*, further develops the notion that each raga evokes a particular rasa experience making the distinction



between divinely inspired *marga* (lit. path to liberation) music and the entertainment *desi* (provincial) music (*Sangitratnakara* 1.1.22-4). [11] Since these Sanskrit treatises link technical musical mastery and *rasa* aesthetics to divine experience, [7] the *marga* devotional music has come to connote Indian “classical” music while *desi* refers to “popular” or “folk” music. However, these terminological boundaries become blurred through the gaze of history when changing modes of patronage and pedagogy, along with aesthetic preferences, culturally influence styles of musical practice. In other words, music termed as “*desi*” may evolve into a “*margi*” genre, which in turn may again be influenced by “*desi*” aesthetics. [11] For example, the prototype of the “classical” *dhruwad* genre was that of the Vaishnava *bhakti* temple tradition, sung in regional vernaculars (*desi*), with a liberative aim (*margi*). *Dhrupad* then developed through courtly patronage as a high-art classical musical genre which has come to be referred to as a *margi* genre even when it has been used for the purpose of courtly entertainment (*desi*).

Sikh devotional music stemmed from the *desi* (regional) cum *margi* (liberative) *bhakti* tradition of fifteenth-century Northern India. Guru Nanak sang *Gurbani Kirtan* in both the “*desi*” popular folk styles used for life-cycle rituals and other ceremonies (*alahniah*, songs for death; *ghorian*, marriage songs; *arti*, prayers; etc.) as well as the “*margi*” *dhruwad* genre popularly used for devotional singing. [18] Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus appropriated folk forms for the singing of *Gurbani Kirtan* so that their messages of temporal and spiritual union could be understood and imbibed by the congregation regardless of musical training. Nevertheless, the Sikh Gurus stressed the importance of music that maintained a devotional aim sung by a singer with a spiritual intent so as to not draw the mind away from focus on the Divine. [18]

### Deconstructing *Dhrupad*: When a “Religious” Genre Becomes “Popular”

The *dhruwad* genre was used as the prime mode of spiritual expression by the Sikh Gurus and other poet saints during the fifteenth to eighteenth

centuries. Rooted in fourteenth-century Vaishnava temple music, it was then introduced to the imperial courts in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. [19] The popularity of *dhruwad* during this time can be attributed to its *desi* and *margi* heritage because the devotional (*margi*) compositions were written in local vernaculars (*desi*) which appealed to the populace while its high-art musicality appealed to the courtly connoisseurs. [11] It was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when *dhruwad*’s popularity was overtaken by the *khyal* genre, that musical skill took precedence over the devotional text, introducing popular (*desi*) musical styles to spiritual (*margi*) expression. The *khyal* genre is marked by the stylistic freedom of melodic and rhythmic improvisation, whereas *dhruwad* is anchored in evoking the poetry through *raga*. [9]

The shift from temple to court patronage during Islamic Mughal rule (1526–1858) heralded a new era for both the musicians and their genres and created a new category of *darbari sangeet* (court music) that utilized “*margi*” musical forms for an entertainment purpose. The courts employed master musicians to symbolize their royal prestige as patrons of the arts as well as for their own musical education as high-cultured rulers. Since the Muslim courts settled in the North, preexisting Indian musical genres became influenced by Persian and Central Asian forms. With the incursion of a new sociopolitical atmosphere and new forms of patronage, originally autonomous genres began to merge where devotional genres became used for the entertainment of royal courts. The *dhruwad* and *khyal* genres as they are witnessed today developed from this interaction.

The Mughal court dispersed towards the end of the nineteenth century with the incursion of British Imperialism that brought Enlightenment Ideology to the Indian cultural arena. This movement privileged reason and the separation of the democratic public from the private religious sphere. [20] During this time, previously fluid Indian cultural traditions were markedly separated through Christianized western ideology and education that promoted a division between the newly defined “secular” and “religious” realms. [8] The

boundaries encouraged by Enlightenment Ideology directly affected Sikh music making and notions of Sikh sovereignty during the Indian Nationalist Movement where the imperially educated native reformists used music, language, and Christianized ideology as tools to create a newly defined pure Sikh identity as modern citizens of an independent Indian nation.

### Enlightenment Ideology and Nationalist Movements

Enlightenment Ideology fed into the Nationalist Movement of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India which became dominated by native elites, especially within the Hindu majority. The previously fluid nature of devotional practice within daily public life came to be replaced with a publicly agreed upon modern notion of “religion” with distinct boundaries. [7, 19] Music was used as a tool towards the nationalist agenda of creating distinct religious identities in an effort to be viewed by the British colonizers as modern subjects of an independent nation. [4] The social elite, informed by their westernized education, desired a “religious” revival of what was perceived as India’s “Golden Age.” Music became central to this process. Hindu National reformists such as Bhatkhande and Paluskar desired a revival of Indian “classical” music which upheld “pure Hindu” aesthetics and ideology as well as modern notions of democratic accessibility. This happened through the historicization of ancient texts such as the *Natyashastra* and *Sangitratnakara*, the creation of a standardized (hence, scientifically modern) form of Hindustani music through raga notation, and by “cleansing” the country of its Islamic influences to retrieve a “pure religious” ideology. [1]

Consistent with the National reformist agenda, Sikh Singh Sabha reformists desired a pure Sikh identity, defined by a pure Sikh music. They ruled in the *Rahit Maryada* that only Sikhs could perform Gurbani Kirtan, removing the professional Muslim rababi musicians from the Sikh musical sphere. [14] Sikh music was also modernized and democratized through educational institutions, by adopting Bhatkhande’s musical notation and by marketing a modern Sikh identity through media

technologies. Singh Sabhaites used dhadi music to propagate Sikh ideals of martyrdom and sacrifice while Gurbani Kirtan became commercialized for a pan-national and emerging diasporic audience. [7] Still, music that was termed as “popular” within Punjabi culture was denigrated by Singh Sabha reformists attempting to uphold the “classical” ideal by defining a pure and moral Sikh identity removed from entertainment forms such as film music, *bhangra* and the romantic *qissa*, *ghazzal*, and *bhajan* genres. [4] Nevertheless, with the advent of recording technology in the late 1960s, Indian musical styles became even more diversified with the new purchasing public as patron. Older “classical” genres were diluted and blended with “popular” styles to appeal to a diverse and musically uneducated audience. Devotional genres such as Gurbani Kirtan were not exempt from this interaction, and through the end of the last century, Gurbani sung in film tunes became the widely preferred musical aesthetic. Sikh music continues to undergo stylistic changes where definitions such as “margi” and “desi” blur and have come to take on new meanings. Specialized patronage of devotional music, which links musical proficiency to evoking a spiritual-aesthetic experience, has been replaced by the global marketplace through the Internet and diasporic communities.

### Contemporary Reformists of Gurbani Kirtan

Since the 1990s traditional Sikh *kirtaniya-ragi* musicians have attempted to once again reform Gurbani Kirtan practice by reviving the link between musical aesthetics and spiritual experience. They promote the idea that Gurbani should be sung in the “Guru’s way” (currently defined as *Gurmat Sangeet*) in spiritually evocative ragas to the accompaniment of stringed instruments (*rabab*, *saranda*, *taus*, *tanpura*, *dilruba*) and *jori-pakawaj* percussion [3] (Image 5). Revivalists of traditional Gurbani Kirtan view modern Gurbani Kirtan, commonly sung in simple tunes by ragis (musicians) to the accompaniment of the *harmonium* (reed organ) and *tabla* (pair of drums), as unable to create the spiritual-aesthetic experience intended by the authors of the Gurbani. They maintain the classical Indian



**Music (Sikh Popular and Religious), Image 5** Performing Gurbani Kirtan in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib on traditional instruments (from left to right: jori, pakawaj, kirtaniya-ragi singer, taus, tanpura, dilruba)

ideology that links musical mastery to the evocation of spiritual rasas which allow for the ego-self to be imbibed with a divine experience. To promote the singing of Gurbani Kirtan in raga, they cite its historical practice, the organization of the Guru Granth Sahib by raga, and the Rahit Maryada which states that Gurbani kirtan means singing the shabad scriptural compositions in raga musical measures. [14] With this it can be understood why it is controversial for Gurbani Kirtan to be sung to film tunes and other entertainment genres which do not uphold the spiritual aesthetics brought about by singing in specific ragas to the accompaniment of stringed instruments but instead excite the mind and cause it to shift from meditative focus on the Divine to other *kam* experiences. [6]

Regardless of reformist conceptions regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy, there are many contemporary Sikh musicians and listeners who view musical style as irrelevant to the cleansing effect of Gurbani on the mind-as-ego for Divine Union. They cite the democratic nature of Sikh practice promoted by modern technology where anyone who so desires can learn simple Gurbani Kirtan compositions from a book, tape, CD, or off the Internet without having to spend countless years studying under the tutelage of a master musician. Modern accessibility through media technologies

and Sikh emigration has affected the transmission, performative styles, and aesthetic preferences of Gurbani Kirtan especially within Punjabi diasporic and global Sikh communities.

Today Sikh devotional music is sung in many languages, with diverse instruments, in various musical styles. Sikh reformists question whether these musical adaptations can be considered a part of Sikh kirtan when not sung in the original Gurmukhi and not upholding Indian musical aesthetics. [2] While the differing styles maintain a devotional focus, reformists emphasize the need for specialized modes of musical production to convey the Gurbani's spiritual aesthetic and bring about a divine experience. The cultural diversity of the global Sikh community has added new complexity to the ideological environment where the "popular" and "religious" realms continue to intersect affecting the reception and performance of Sikh music.

### **Sikh Music: Aesthetics, Memory, and Identity**

Sikh musical ideology is intimately intertwined with notions of acceptable change. One of the main messages that permeates the Gurbani is a soteriological one, that of how to experience the Divine Nam. It is by cleansing one's mental state through the experiential practices of Nam Simran and Gurbani Kirtan, which the mind

becomes focused on the Nam. With the practice of meditation and singing being the methods to cleanse the mind, Sikhs have differing opinions as to which stylistic methodology best allows for divine experience.

Sikh music developed as a devotional practice where the Gurus shared their enlightened experiences through song. They promoted remembrance of the Nam through Gurbani Kirtan sung in raga melody, often in the devotional dhrupad genre, which evoked spiritual rasas for Divine Union. However, Sikh musical orthopraxy was influenced by changing patronage and popular entertainment aesthetics. By the nineteenth century, Singh Sabha reformists were trying to maintain Sikh communal identity causing reformations of Sikh ideology, identity, and devotional practice to fit with the notion of a modern Sikh self. The advent of modern technology shaped Sikh self-perception where Gurbani Kirtan and Dhadi Vars were mediated representations of Sikh authority and communal memory. Sociopolitical influences have created a merging of musical styles ultimately leading to the contemporary reform of Gurbani Kirtan which links musical orthopraxy to spiritual attainment.

The contemporary disjuncture between traditional and modernist Gurbani Kirtan aesthetics is due in large part to the modernizing effect of British colonialism where new educational institutions, recording technology, and notions of democratic accessibility replaced specialized modes of musical practice. However, the revival of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan production illustrates a thread of continuity that has been sustained within India's musical ideology since Vedic times, which maintains aesthetic parameters connecting musical emotion to divine experience. The Sikh Gurus and authors of the Guru Granth Sahib describe a profound spiritual experience through the practice of music. The modes of musical production they passed on to their devotees have been remembered by some, while the influences of other musical genres have been explored by others. Throughout the worldwide community, Sikhs continue to seek a glimpse of the Divine and reaffirm Sikh memory and identity through the practice of music.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Dhadi\(s\)](#)
- ▶ [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Gurbani Kirtan](#)
- ▶ [Gurmat Sangeet](#)
- ▶ [Gurmukh](#)
- ▶ [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Japji](#)
- ▶ [Kirtan](#)
- ▶ [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Mind \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Poetry](#)
- ▶ [Ragas \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Ragis \(in Sikh Kirtan Tradition\)](#)
- ▶ [Rituals](#)
- ▶ [Sant Sipahi](#)
- ▶ [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Word](#)

## References

1. Bakhle J (2005) Two men and music: nationalism in the making of an Indian classical tradition. Oxford University Press, Oxford
2. Dusenbery VA (1992) The word as Guru: Sikh scripture and the translation controversy. *Hist Relig* 31(5):385–402
3. Kaur IN (Spring–Fall 2011) Sikh Shabad Kirtan and Gurmat Sangit. *J Punjab Stud* 18(1–2):251–278
4. van der Linden, B (2008) Sikh music and empire: the moral representation of self in music. *Sikh formations*, vol 4, No. 1. Routledge, London
5. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the West: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
6. Mansukhani GS (1982) Indian classical music and Sikh Kirtan. Oxford & IBH Publishing, New Delhi
7. Nijahawan M (2006) Dhadi Darbar: religion, violence and the performance of Sikh history. Oxford University Press, Oxford
8. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
9. Raja D (2005) Hindustani music: a tradition in transitions. D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, New Delhi
10. Rowell L (1992) Music and musical thought in early India. University of Chicago Press, Chicago

11. Sanyal R, Widdess R (2004) *Dhrupad: tradition and performance in Indian*. Aldershot, Hants
12. Shackle C, Mandair A (2005) *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Sikh scriptures*. Routledge, London
13. Shankar VN, Kaur H (2005) *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, India
14. Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Delhi (2006) *Sikh Rehat Maryada*. Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, New Delhi
15. Singh BB (2001) "Kirtan in historical perspectives". Second annual Ahluwalia memorial lecture. Berkeley University, California
16. Singh J (1998) *Varan Bhai Gurdas: text, transliteration and translation*, 2 vols. Vision and Venture, Patiala
17. Singh M (trans) (1996) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee, Amritsar
18. Singh P (2006) *Sikhism and Music*. In: Beck G (ed) *Sacred sound: experiencing music in world religions*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Ontario, pp 141–167
19. Thielemann S (2001) *Musical traditions of Vaishnava temples in Vraja: a comparative study of samaja and the dhrupad tradition of North Indian classical music: volume I and II*. Sagar Printers and Publishers, New Delhi
20. van der Veer P (2001) *Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford



# N

---

## Naam

- [Nam \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Nadar

- [Fate \(Destiny\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Nam Japna

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Nam Simran

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Nam (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Naam](#)

## Definition

*Nam* is literally “the name.” *Nam* is a central term used and developed throughout Sikh history. It expresses the paradoxical divine attribute which is existent and nonexistent at the same time. *Nam* is the link by means of which all existing things acknowledge their nonexistent source, as well as the means by which each self acknowledges the link to its voided other.

## The Treasure House of *Nam*

*Nam* is typically seen in conjunction with other key terms such as *shabad*, *guru*, and *hukam*. This is because it shares a relation with these other integral Sikh ideas. [1, 2, 5] In the Guru Granth Sahib, *nam* is considered to be the treasure house or *nidhan*, through which the devotee’s being is illumined; focussing upon it, a devotee is enriched. As such, it is an integral aspect of Sikh praxis through meditative practices like *nam-simran*, or constant awareness of *nam*, and *nam-japana* which involves repetition of divine attributes. *Nam* has been understood as a term which is able to express the nature of whatever it is designating. It is not simply a naming of the divine as God. [1, 3, 4] As it is used in the Guru Granth Sahib, *nam* cannot simply be reduced to God’s Name or the names of individual gods. *Nam* is

used in a more subtle way to illustrate the paradox of the One and the Many. Throughout the Guru Granth, *nam* serves to replace what is named in other (especially religious and philosophical) traditions as “God” whose name is no more than a tool for calling this entity to mind at will. However, this is not a simple replacement of the name God because *nam* makes the need to name any entity by making the term God superfluous. In doing so, *nam* constitutes the single most important term for deriving a posttheistic gurnat. [1]

*Nam* is not an indicator of transcendental experience as it is of the possibility of all possible experience. For the Gurus, any “God” or “god” that is outside of the ego is to remain subject to the operation of *maya*, the veil of illusion generated by the ego. Although “God” is referred to as the highest or ultimate, etc., these superlatives still only refer to a highest or ultimate entity which remains within a scale determined by man. [1, 3, 4] Thus, whereas a term such a “God” is liable to be turned into an idol, and therefore never experienced as such, *nam* signifies that divinity can only be experienced through the meeting of eternity and time, absolute and finite. Therefore, the term *nam* is as much theological as it is political. [1] This is because *nam* is actualized through a relation of equivalence between ineffability/absence or fullness/presence both of which are aspects of that which is formless. This is seen in the idea of *sargun nirgun nirankar*. *Nam* paradoxically names an ineffable fullness and therefore is a signifier of emptiness, an empty signifier. *Nam*, therefore, implies an entity involved in the world but at the same time absent from it. It is therefore simultaneously a divine attribute as well as a way of being in the world. [1, 3, 4] Bodily comportment is realized through the appropriation of *nam* and the disappropriation of ego. [1, 2] Through *nam* conceptual dualities such as religion and politics or mysticism and violence become superfluous. [1] This is evident in the lives of the Sikh Gurus for whom there was no contradiction between what is typically a mystical experience and the life within society. [1]

## Cross-References

- [Guru](#)
- [Philosophy](#)

## References

1. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
2. Nabha KS (1999) *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh*. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
3. Singh J (1983) *The religious philosophy of Guru Nanak*. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
4. Singh W (1995) *Sikh Darshanadhara*. Punjabi University, Patiala
5. Singh H (1998) “Nam” in the encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Namadeva

- [Namdev](#)

---

## Namdeo

- [Namdev](#)

---

## Namdev

Susan Prill  
Department of Religious Studies, Juniata College,  
Huntingdon, PA, USA

## Synonyms

[Namadeva](#); [Namdeo](#)

## Definition

Namdev (fl. thirteenth to fourteenth century) was a poet-saint from Maharashtra who composed

hymns in praise of *Vitthal* (a local manifestation of Vishnu). He is also considered a precursor of the North Indian Sant tradition, which advocated devotion to a formless God.

## Life and Works

Namdev is believed to have been born into a low-caste family in the state of Maharashtra, in central Western India. His family was *chhimba* by caste and was occupied either as calico printers or as tailors. The traditional dates given for Namdev are 1270–1350. ([3], p. 25) Namdev became an ardent devotee of the god Vitthal, a regional version of Vishnu/Krishna, whose cult (known as Varkari) is centered in the town of Pandharpur. ([7], p. 183) Pandharpur is sometimes given as Namdev's birthplace, as is the town of Narsi Bahmani. ([9], p. 47) The steps to the Vitthal temple contain a shrine to Namdev on the purported site of his death. Sikhs and some Punjabi Hindus hold that he died in Ghoman, in Western Punjab, more than a 1,000 miles to the north.

The differing views on Namdev's place of death illustrate one of Namdev's most significant contributions to Indian religious life. He is commonly understood as a link between *sagun bhakti* (devotion to something with qualities, such as a deity) and *nirgun bhakti* (devotion to a formless God). Namdev thus forms a connection between two different traditions which are referred to as *Sant*: the Maharashtrian devotional group centered on Jnanadev and the Northern Sant tradition, whose most famous exponent was Kabir. [8, 11, 12] Many members of the latter tradition, as well as Namdev himself, are included in the Sikh scripture, known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. [9] Namdev is generally understood to have traveled to the north, and these travels also serve to link the two traditions. Some scholars have suggested that there are multiple individuals behind the Namdev legends and compositions, and that the Punjabi Namdev is in fact a later figure known as Vishnudas Nama. ([5], p. 148)

In accordance with the tradition that Namdev traveled north, there are two main poetic

traditions attributed to him: one in old Marathi and the other in old Hindi. The Marathi compositions, known as *abhangas*, have been compiled in a critical edition by the Maharashtrian government. Callewaert and Lath have prepared a critical edition of the Hindi songs found in Rajasthani manuscripts of the seventeenth century. [2]

In Maharashtra, Namdev is remembered as one of the founders of the *Varkari* movement, together with Jnanadev. It is believed that Namdev traveled with Jnanadev, spreading the message of *bhakti* to all who would listen. He is thus remembered as an extraordinary devotee, and many of the legends around his life serve to emphasize his great faith in Vitthal. Indeed, it is said that “Vitthal” was his first word. In his later years, Namdev is said to have settled down in Maharashtra, and his maid-servant from this period, Janabai, is a well-known saint in her own right. Legend holds that Namdev's last wish was to be buried in the steps of the Vitthal temple so that he would be continually blessed by the dust of the feet of saints and devotees. The Namdev Payari of the Vitthal temple is understood to fulfill this wish. ([1], p. 187)

In North India, Namdev's later years are remembered somewhat differently. His Hindi *pads* (hymns), rather than his Marathi *abhangas*, are sung throughout North India, and 61 of his hymns are found in the Sikh *Guru Granth*. There are temples and *gurdwaras* dedicated to Namdev in Delhi, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab. In many cases, these shrines are maintained by people belonging to the tailor caste.

In Sikhism, Namdev is considered a *bhagat*, one of the predecessors of Guru Nanak whose thinking is in line with early Sikh ideology. [9, 10] Of the 61 hymns by Namdev in the *Guru Granth*, many make mention of autobiographical details or of the all-pervasiveness of God. Namdev in the *Guru Granth* is much less involved with devotion to Vitthal/Krishna than the Marathi Namdev. Interestingly, the compositions of Namdev in the *Guru Granth* overlap only somewhat with those found in manuscripts from neighboring Rajasthan. Namdev is generally portrayed

in Sikh art as an old man, as he is believed to have lived in Punjab for his last decades, [6] and many Sikhs believe that he is entombed in the town of Ghoman. Sikhs believe Namdev to have performed many miracles in or near Punjab, some of which the Maharashtrian tradition locates in Maharashtra. Ghoman (“turning”) is allegedly named after one of Namdev’s most famous miracles, in which a temple turned to face him.

### Namdev in Modern Times

Like many other low-caste Sants, Namdev is sometimes invoked as a liberatory model for low-caste and Dalit people in the modern world. Despite his humble birth, Namdev was able to achieve an extremely close relationship with his chosen deity, and this closeness is understood as an implicit critique of caste hierarchy. Namdev’s own discussions of caste tend to center on the theme of humility, with higher castes being accused of vanity, much like other elites. His tone in this regard is generally much milder than that of Northern Sants such as Kabir. ([4], p. 59) Still, for low-caste Indians, and particularly for members of the chhimba caste, Namdev is an honored forefather.

Namdev’s extensive travels, as remembered throughout North India, also set him apart from most of the other Sants. In the period since Indian independence, Namdev has been cited by politicians and others as uniting India both geographically, religiously, and across caste boundaries. ([5], p. 194) This nationalist understanding of Namdev has looked to him as a model for reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims and between various caste and regional groups. The religious and regional diversity of the Namdev tradition is thus understood as one of his greatest strengths.

### Cross-References

- [Bhakti \(Bhagti\)](#)
- [Sants](#)

### References

1. Barthwal PD (1936) *The Nirguna school of Hindi poetry: an exposition of medieval Santa mysticism*. Indian Book Shop, Benares
2. Callewaert WM, Lath M (1989) *The Hindi Padavali of Namdev: a critical edition of Namdev’s Hindi songs with translation and annotation*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
3. Callewaert WM, Op de Beeck B (1991) *Devotional Hindi literature, vols I–II*. Manohar, Delhi
4. Gold D (1987) *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in north Indian tradition*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
5. Novetzke C (2008) *Religion and public memory: a cultural history of saint Namdev in India*. Columbia University Press, New York
6. Prill S (2009) Representing sainthood in India: Sikh and Hindu visions of Namdev. *Mater Relig* 5(2):155–178
7. Ranade RD (1933) *Mysticism in Maharashtra: Indian mysticism*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. Reprinted 1982
8. Schomer K (1987) Introduction: the Sant tradition in perspective. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
9. Singh N (1981) *Bhagata Namadev in the Guru Grantha*. Punjabi University, Patiala
10. Singh P (2003) *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh self-definition and the Bhagat Bani*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
11. Vaudeville C (1987) Sant Mat: santism as the universal path to sanctity. In: Schomer K, McLeod W (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley, pp 21–40
12. Vaudeville C (1987) The Shaiva-Vaishnava synthesis in Maharashtrian Santism. In: Schomer K, McLeod W (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley, pp 215–228

---

### Nanak (Guru)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and  
Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Synonyms

[Guru; Sikh](#)

## Definition

The founding figure behind the entire Sikh movement whose teachings and life experience became the inspiration and model for the nine Gurus who followed him.

## Guru Nanak

Sikhi(sm) originated in the Punjab region of northwestern India with the teaching and life experience of one man, Guru Nanak. By the fifteenth century, Punjab was dominated by two traditions: Islam and the variety of highly stratified Hindu traditions. It was during this time that a loosely aligned movement of holy men or spiritual adepts known as the *bhaktas* (also called “Sants”) emerged throughout India. Influential figures among the *bhaktas* – such as Sheikh Farid, Kabir, Namdev, and Raidas – sought to reconcile the two opposing dominant faiths of Muslims and Hindus by emphasizing a path of devotion based on the meditative repetition of the divine Name. Rejecting social distinctions and formal ritual, the *bhaktas* expressed their teachings in vernacular poetry based on inner experience. Combining the search for perfection with devotional discipline, the poetic compositions of these teachers contained insights in common with Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist mysticism. Although the teachings of Guru Nanak were broadly in line with those of the *bhaktas*, his own mission emerged out of his own direct experience and signalled a third way that was to become the path of Nanak (*Nanak Panth*). The practice of this path came to be called Sikhi by his immediate followers. [1, 3, 4]

The literary genre known as *janamsakhis* are the primary source for how Guru Nanak’s life was understood by learned members of the developing Sikh community. Like other hagiographic literature the *janamsakhis* contain much that is considered anecdotal. Nevertheless they provide a clear and vibrant account of Guru Nanak’s life. Some of these anecdotes speak about the early signs of Nanak’s extraordinariness, such as his being

greeted at birth by heavenly beings, or the amazement of the Muslim midwife, Daultan, when she heard the baby Nanak laugh like a grown man, or the astrologers who foretold the child’s future greatness. [3, 4, 8, 9]

Guru Nanak was born on 15 April 1469 in the village of Rai Bhoi Talwandi, known today as Nankana Sahib and located some 40 miles west of Lahore. His father was Mehta Kalu, a member of the Khatri caste lineage and a *patwari* or village accountant by profession. Nanak’s mother was Tripta and he had an elder sister, Nanaki, who was 4 years his senior. Although many of the *janamsakhis* state that Nanak was born in his father’s village, it is claimed that both he and his sister were born in their maternal home, *nanake*, as also suggested by the choice of their names, Nanaki and Nanak. [1, 3, 4, 8, 9]

Guru Nanak would be married to Sulakhani, the daughter of a man named Mula of Batala who was also a caste *Kshatriya* of Chona subcaste. Mula had resided in a village named Pakho ke Randhavi where he worked as a *patwari*, or accountant. This town figures prominently in the *Janamsakhis*. From all accounts Guru Nanak was fond of the residents and would often hold discourses for their benefit; one famous discourse held in this town was with a prominent Sikh of the Guru named Ajita Randhawa. Guru Nanak had two sons, Lakhmi Das and Sri Chand. Lakhmi Das is generally given only passing notice in most accounts of Guru Nanak’s life that he engaged in what might be considered the typical Khatri lifestyle. Sri Chand shared Guru Nanak’s interests in the spiritual pursuits but was however attracted to a more ascetic path and therefore practiced yoga. Sri Chand eventually established a group of followers and likely attempted to usurp the authority which Guru Nanak vested in the second guru, Angad. Guru Nanak’s wife, Sulakhani, and their two sons would spend a considerable amount of time in what is remembered as Sulakhani’s maternal home at Pakho ke Randhavi. Their prolonged residence at Pakho ke Randhavi was likely due to the many years of travel where Guru Nanak met and taught numerous individuals as well as other holymen of his day. In 1521, upon returning from



one of his last sojourns, Guru Nanak was granted a parcel of land upon which he established a town named Kartarpur. Kartarpur, which today is called Dera Baba Nanak, was the site where the early Sikh *sangat*, or congregation, established itself. It is located within walking distance of Pakho ke Randhawi. [1, 3, 4, 8, 9]

At the behest of his sister Nanaki's husband, Jai Ram, Guru Nanak spent time working under the employment of Daulat Khan Lodi some time during the last decade of the fifteenth century. In several of the *janamsakhi* accounts a small community of people whom Guru Nanak had begun teaching at Rai Bhoe Talwandi followed him to Sultanpur and also took up employment in the town. These followers were already engaged in singing of hymns, known as *kirtan*, the meditational practice of *nam-simran*, as well as maintain a *langar*, or communal kitchen; all these aspects of practice were advocated by Guru Nanak and quickly became institutionalized. It is at Sultanpur that Guru Nanak is thought to have had an experience of the divine. This experience was radical and led Guru Nanak to leave the Khan's employment and depart from the city to spend many years during the remainder of his life travelling across much of the South Asian subcontinent and, possibly, throughout parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. [3, 8, 9]

The narration of these travels is typically punctuated by a return to the outskirts of his ancestral village where Nanak would continue to hold discourses for the residents, members of his kin groups, and at times, his parents. Most notably Guru Nanak is always said to have donned a peculiar form of dress which immediately made him recognizable as a holyman but most of his interlocutors are unable to locate him beyond a general type. Indeed, it is their wonder over the appearance of Guru Nanak that sparks a discourse. He was accompanied on these travels by Mardana, one of the people who followed Guru Nanak from his village to Sultanpur. Mardana was from a familial line of musicians retained by Guru Nanak's family. The two are said to have been compatriots and friends from a young age. Mardana played the rabab and during the course of their travels would routinely be asked by Guru

Nanak to play it while a shabad was sung by the Guru. Mardana was also witness to the numerous discourses Guru Nanak would have and perhaps the Guru's most vehement interlocutor. There are *janamsakhi* traditions which describe Mardana as having been the constant companion of the Guru but other versions relate how Mardana was not the sole companion but that other prominent disciples may have been with the Guru for differing sojourns. [3–5]

While the precise itinerary for Guru Nanak's travels is difficult to know, the *janamsakhis* typically state that he went on four separate journeys, or *udasis*, one in each cardinal direction. However, this is not consistent across all *janamsakhi* manuscripts. Some make mention of a fifth *udasis* and the general consensus of four travels one in each of the cardinal directions arose during colonialism when reformers began working to create a consistent narrative on Guru Nanak's life history. This is clear from the manuscripts which do not contain a consistent itinerary of travel, nor are the places visited necessarily the same. It is generally agreed upon that Guru Nanak traveled to major pilgrimage centers and localities where other prominent holymen were in residence or a lineage of teachers had set up a center. Guru Nanak's travels are thought to have included places such as Kurukshetra, Mathura, Haridvar, and Banaras as well as Mecca, Medina, and Baghdad. The narratives of his travels to these places will most likely include a discourse with the *pan-dits*, *sadhus*, and *yogis* or *pirs*, *mullas*, and *qazis*. Amongst the most popular accounts of such travels is Guru Nanak's dialogue with Nath Yogis who were practioners of *hatha yoga*. Guru Nanak would often also meet rulers and kings of the places he visited – one important instance of such a meeting was with Babur during the raid on Saidpur. Many of these narratives are thought to not only be historical but they also reflect the sociocultural norms of Sikhs as well as the ways in which early sangats remember Guru Nanak. Lastly, they are an important source for thinking about Sikh ethics. [3–5, 9]

In the hymns found in the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak emphasizes that the aim of life was to cut through the shallowness of ordinary social

existence in order to achieve a perfection of consciousness through a transformative sovereign experience. But how to achieve this transformation from unfree existence (*manmukh*) to sovereign existence (*gurmukh*)? Before Guru Nanak achieved the breakthrough that gave him his life's task, he patiently submitted himself to a certain kind of discipline (*sadhana*). Two central hymns composed by Guru Nanak are *jappi* and *siddh gosti* which together with the *mul mantar* develop the intellectual core of the Sikh tradition. These hymns form the core of the teachings about Oneness which Guru Nanak emphasized. They describe the importance of repetition of the Name (*nam*), submission to *hukam*. They describe the inconsistencies of mysticism as well as overtly juridical ritualistic faiths and are often critical of contemporary practices such as yoga or meditation using idols as the focal point. [3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10]

The subsequent line of nine Sikh Gurus continued developing the teachings and established a far reaching community around the core teachings established by Guru Nanak. All of the Sikh Gurus are traditionally thought of as Guru Nanak or extensions of his mission. This process is described using the image of the union of two flames or souls and is known as *joti-joti-samaona*. As such, the subsequent Gurus developed Guru Nanak's thought further using the poetic form known generally as *bani*, they expounded upon and passed on their teachings to the community that grew around them. Their poems and hymns are of surpassing beauty and directness and can be found primarily within the Adi Granth, also known as the Guru Granth Sahib. However, the last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh's verses are housed in Dasam Granth. Both are recognized masterpieces of Indian devotional literature. [3, 6, 7]

## Cross-References

- [Gurmukh](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Janamsakhis](#)
- [Kirtan](#)

## References

1. Grewal JS (1969) *Guru Nanak in history*. Panjab University, Chandigarh
2. Grewal JS (1992) *Guru Nanak in Western scholarship*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
3. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
4. McLeod WH (1968) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
5. McLeod WH (1979) *Early Sikh tradition: a study of the Janam-sakhis*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
6. Singh J (1969) *Guru Nanak lectures*. University of Madras, Madras
7. Singh T (1992) *Guru Nanak: his mind and art*. Bahri Publication, New Delhi
8. Singh H (1998) *Guru Nanak*. In: *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (2004) *The Janamsakhi tradition: an analytical study*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
10. Talib GS (1969) *Guru Nank: his personality and vision*. Gurdas Kapur, Delhi

## Niramalas

- [Nirmala\(s\)](#)

## Niramale

- [Nirmala\(s\)](#)

## Nirgun Bhakti

- [Sant\(s\)](#)

## Nirmala(s)

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Niramalas](#); [Niramale](#); [Nirmale](#)

## Definition

Nirmalas are a sect or suborder within the Sikh tradition that is typically construed as heterodox which primarily developed during the eighteenth century. They were exegetes of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and other early Sikh literature. Their method of exegesis relied primarily upon Vedic, Classical, and Advaita Vedantic schools of thought.

## Main Text

Thirteen years prior to establishing the *Khalsa Panth*, Guru Gobind, the last Sikh Guru, selected five young Singhs to adopt the saffron sartorial dress of a *brahmacharya* student and sent them to Kashi, or Varanasi, to learn Sanskrit from Sadanand Pandit. [2] The names of these young Sikhs have come down through tradition as Ram Singh, Karam Singh, Ganda Singh, Sobha Singh, and Namantar Saina Singh. It is said that they returned to Punjab after the Khalsa was established in 1699, and upon their return, they also took *amrit*, thereby becoming members of the Khalsa panth – however, they were referred to as the Nirmalas, or the untainted ones. [1]

There is an ongoing debate amongst Sikh scholars regarding whether the Nirmala sect originates with the above narrative or whether they were an outgrowth of an older exegetical tradition that immersed itself in Vedic and Sanskrit learning which began during the life of Guru Nanak. This tradition continued to grow up to the guruship of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth guru, and was known as the *Udasi sampardaya*. This sect, however, at least nominally retained its distinction due to the ascetic form of practice, whereas the Nirmalas seem to have promoted a different interpretation of the Sikh path. [2] Whatever the case may be, the Nirmalas maintain the validity of the above connection with Guru Gobind, and through this connection, they uphold the valid lineage of ten gurus that orthodox Sikhs consider the proponents of Guru Nanak's message. In sending these five Singhs and putatively establishing the Nirmala sect, Guru Gobind is

thought to have attempted to spread Sanskrit philosophy and Vedic knowledge outside the pale of its sacrosanct Brahmanic fold. Furthermore, as the Khalsa and the Nirmalas can both be thought of as rooted in associations of spiritual attainment or release and purity, Guru Gobind is thought to have furthered the idea of *miri-piri* by remapping this upon the distinction between *shastar* and *shāstar*, or knowledge of weaponry and spiritual-philosophical knowledge, by inculcating a collapse of linguistic and theologically maintained difference between Muslim and Hindu, or Arabic and Sanskrit. [2] However, it seems that this distinction has not been emphasized in the historical narratives as they have come down to us currently. Modern scholarship, especially that written in English, has been primarily focussed upon attempting to expound upon the differences between Sikh orthodoxy and the Nirmalas -this has occurred especially in terms of practice and doxa.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, the Nirmalas spent a period of hiatus at spiritual centers mainly in Haridwara, Banaras, and Allahabad. [1] They would return to Panjab in the latter half of the eighteenth century to an atmosphere that was drastically changed from that which they had left. It was during this period that Banda Singh Bahadur's rebellion occurred and is supposed to have drastically changed the course of the Sikh community. Upon their return, it appears that they reestablished the dual goal of first, taking the Sikh message to other intellectual traditions in the spirit of debate and exchange as well as, second, enabling access to the larger tradition of learning through *Gurmukhi*. They established centers of learning called *akharas* from where they could engage their project of teaching. [1, 3]

The Nirmalas by this time were steeped in the Sanskrit language as well as its textual and intellectual traditions. They are thought to have freely employed the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, and *Upanishads*, as well as aspects from Sanskrit philosophical schools to interpret the *Guru Granth Sahib* and other early Sikh texts; they also used a number of different linguistic registers to assist in the broad transmission of their texts, enabling a greater breadth of interpretive nuance. Through this

interpretive strategy, they introduced a large lexicon from the *sadhu bhasa* that came to be used as a *lingua franca* amongst exegetes and adepts during the early modern and premodern periods. Furthermore, this linguistic method allowed them to immerse their interpretations more deeply within the equivocality present in many sabads found in the Guru Granth Sahib. They were thus able to develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of many portions of the Guru Granth than were available amongst other concurrent interpretive traditions, or *sampardayas*. They also populated their interpretations with mythic, folkloric, and puranic motifs; testimony from the Upanishads and Vedantic intellectual texts began to be used to substantiate interpretations with of the Guru Granth as opposed to what initially seems to have been meant at some level to be as an intellectual challenge to these traditions. As the Nirmala *sampardaya* continued to evolve it increasingly incorporated concepts and intellectual strands from the Vedantic Schools. They also borrowed devotional themes from *prem bhakti*, which were not accorded the same prominence in the larger Sikh interpretive schools. This led to a high degree of ambiguity and multiplicity in meaning which only led to a greater degree of uncertainty for Sikhs after the vacuum that was left by the tenth guru's death.

In continuance of the paradox of their origins, the Nirmalas, despite their engagement and later immersion in Brahmanic/Sanskritic thought, continued to maintain connections with the Khalsa. From a Nirmala perspective, their work was intimately related to what the Khalsa was meant to represent; they thought of themselves as wholly part of the Khalsa and not distinct from it. [2] This is seen in that the Nirmalas commonly partaken of amrit and kept their hair unshorn. In fact, no one can engage in learning from the Nirmalas without having first taken these rites of passage. Learning has always intimately involved the use of Gurmukhi lipi that came to be the preferred script for writing amongst Sikhs. [1–3] The Nirmalas have been extremely prolific and have left a large corpus of texts, dictionaries, and translations of Sanskrit texts into Punjabi through Gurmukhi. They have unquestioningly embraced

older traditions of learning without having to sacrifice politics of sovereignty.

## Cross-References

- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Jaggi RS (2002) Guru Granth Vishavkosh. Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala
2. Parashar S (1997) Udasi Sampradaya ka Hindi Sahitya. Piyusha Prakashana, Delhi
3. Singh T (1988) Gurbani dian Viakhian Pranalian. Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala

## Nirmale

- [Nirmala\(s\)](#)

N

## Nitnem

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

*Nitnem* encompass the daily practice of reciting certain prayers at specific designated intervals.

## The Sikh Litany

Most Sikhs observe a daily routine known as *nitnem* (lit. repetition of a rule) that is based on the model of Guru Nanak's discipline of *nam simran* (repetition of the Name). First, the Sikh

must arise early, typically before sunrise, bathe, and then sing the following hymns from the scripture: Guru Nanak's Japji and Guru Gobind Singh's Jaap and the ten Savayyas. [1, 6] This can take anywhere between 30 min to an hour to complete and many even begin reciting the Japji as they bathe. During the day the Sikh is expected to work for his or her living. Secondly, at sunset he or she should repeat the selection known as Rahiras, and finally, just before retiring to bed the Sohila. A form of prayer called *ardas* (lit. petition) is recited at the conclusion of the morning and evening recitations. [4, 5] Many people, especially women, also recite Sukhmani – a long and beautiful hymn composed by Guru Arjan which extols the virtues of the Beloved's Name. Many Sikhs will endeavor to memorize these compositions, a task that is made easier by the strong poetic rhyming in all of them. Typically, though, many Sikhs use a gutka or small prayer book, containing these and other compositions such as Asa ki Var, for recitation. The *nitnem* can be performed individually, as a family, or as member of

a *gurdwara* sangat (congregation). In whatever way it is practiced, the purpose of *nitnem* is to calm the mind by bringing the Name (*nam*) constantly to mind. [2–4]

## Cross-References

► [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Cole WO (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon Press, London
2. Kohli SS (1992) A conceptual encyclopedia of Guru Granth Sahib. Manohar, Delhi
3. Kohli SS (1996) Dictionary of Guru Granth Sahib. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
4. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: A Guide to the Perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
5. Nabha KS (1999) Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
6. Singh H (1998) Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala



## Orientalism (Sikhism)

Sunit Singh

Divinity School, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

### Synonyms

British empire; Colonialism; Colonial-era Punjab; Comparative Study of Religions; Ethnography; Historical research on Sikhism; Maharajah Ranjit Singh; Reform and Revivalism; Revivalism; Sikh theology; Singh Sabha; Singh Sabhas

### Definition

Orientalism in its original eighteenth-century sense referred to the authoritative study of the Orient based on linguistic knowledge (modern or classical). At least in the case of India, as the project of trying to effectuate a cosmopolitan British empire fell apart in the nineteenth century, Orientalism came to refer to the view that India had to be paternalistically ruled through the medium of local vernaculars and through the categories of native custom. Yet, in contemporary Sikh studies, Orientalism refers to the late-twentieth-century idea that since the Enlightenment, Anglo-French scholars had (wittingly or unwittingly) conflated the actual Orient with its

simulacrum while sometimes providing an apologia for the exigencies of western imperialism.

### Sikh Studies on Orientalism

The antecedents of contemporary Sikh studies date to the era after decolonization, when a group of influential Sikh scholars sought to offer a nationalist corrective to the dominant colonial-era historiography by positivistically adjudicating its truth claims about the nature of Sikh rule in the Punjab and essential aspects of the Sikh faith. [1] The discipline was transfigured in the 1980s and 1990s, at the height of the “culture wars” that were fought over the (im)possibility of an authentic hermeneutic encounter across cultures, as the center of gravity of Sikh studies shifted to universities outside of the Punjab. [2] One result of the culture wars was the broad acceptance of the thesis that Edward Said had outlined in *Orientalism* (1978): At least since the Enlightenment, Anglo-French scholars of non-western cultures had not understood the Orient, so much as ventriloquized it in accordance with their own cultural-ideological values. [3] After Said, cultural historians of India came to stress the corrosive influence of the idea that India, stuck in a more backward stage of development within the dialectic of freedom as a consequence of its idolatrous Hindu civilization, was not equally as modern as Britain, France, or Germany. [4] A scale of

comparative civilizational development was seen as providing an alibi for empire; specifically, works such as James Mill's *History of British India* (1817) and G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (posthumously compiled from lecture notes in 1840) were, *inter alia*, identified as sources of this presumptuously Eurocentric idea. [5] Dissatisfied with the limited space for native agency that this developmentalist model of historical stages implied, scholars in the field of religious studies came to see religion as neither a transhistorical nor a straightforwardly transcultural category of self-identification, emphasizing instead the view that colonialism formed an uneven "encounter" in which each side nevertheless maintained its own cultural particularity. [6] The culture wars came to a consensus, still normative within Sikh studies, that affirmed the incommensurable difference of nonwestern cultures even as it indicted the historicist or liberal-humanist claims of orientalist erudition. Yet, no sooner had this anti-imperialist ethos come into relief than this seemingly recondite row turned into a politically explosive issue within Sikh studies, as Sikhs in the diaspora backed the lost cause of militant Sikh separatism that had ravished the Punjab in the 1980s, precipitating an acerbic battle, which extended well beyond academia, over who had the right to offer an interpretation of the Sikh tradition. [7]

It is undeniable that some colonial-era commentators, particularly after the catastrophic British experience of the sepoy rebellion of 1857, were in fact chauvinist imperialists influenced by casuistic "race science." Yet, at least in the Sikh case, the archive of knowledge that the orientalists created remains a primary source for historical studies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which makes it difficult to write off the entire enterprise. Further, it is difficult to see the earliest writers who wrote on Sikhism as presenting a unified historical, western, orientalist (in the sense that Said outlines), or proselytizing Protestant worldview. Quite often, the sketches of the Sikhs were not, strictly speaking, the work of philologically trained orientalists but rather the observations of adventurers, mercenaries, or East India Company (EIC) administrators whose descriptions offer us a multifaceted mirror through which to contemplate aspects of Sikhism

that simply are no more, while also providing us a framework with which to analyze the transformations within the short-lived Sikh "successor state" that bridged the collapse of the Mughal empire and the rise of British rule in the Punjab. Without papering over the weaknesses or the aporias in colonial-era studies of the Sikhs, some orientalists were in fact models of encyclopedic erudition, and their writings shed light on otherwise obscure facets of Sikh history. What follows, then, is an overview of some of the important orientalist works on the Sikhs that were written before 1900. While neither downplaying the historical importance of colonialism nor the influence that it exerted even on those scholars at a remove from the immediate concerns of the imperial state, this overview attempts to deal with orientalist scholarship by placing its various truth claims in their determinate historical contexts, with an eye to placing both the colonizers as well as the indigenous actors within a single sociotemporal context – albeit with different subject positions and cultural repertoires. [8]

### Colonial-Era Accounts of the Sikhs

Before the EIC formalized its eastern empire in 1765 by accepting responsibility for the fiscal administration of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, its officers seldom came across orthodox Sikhs or scrutinized the doctrines of their religion, even though some merchants identified as votaries of the first Sikh Guru, Nanak, were involved in the robust commerce of Bengal. Based on the best available compendiums of English records, the first occasion that an EIC officer had to observe Sikhs close at hand apparently arose in the spring of 1716 at Delhi, where an EIC mission in the Mughal capital witnessed the publicly held executions of 700 Sikh rebels as well as their chief Banda Bahadur. [9] "It is not a little remarkable," wrote the head of the mission in a letter to the Governor of Fort William, the resolve with which the rebels "undergo their fate" without apostasy in the name of their "new formed religion." [10] Of the devotees of Guru Nanak in Bengal, Amir Chand (sometimes referred to as Omichund or

Umichund), was an exceptionally successful merchant of the *khatri* caste and was implicated in the English machinations to dethrone the independent ruler of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, which culminated in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. [11] Amir Chand was personally dependent on English trade for his livelihood, but this should not obscure the fact that native merchants sought the extension of English rule as politically desirable, since the EIC fought the exorbitant duties, predatory violations, and arbitrary tolls that continued to be exacted from merchants passing their wares through the territories of rivalrous local chieftains. It is also worth pointing out in this connection that the East India Company's transformation from a mercantilist enterprise into a territorial state was itself the result of remarkable vicissitudes in fortune for the English, whose hold on India was uncertain as late as 1756, when Siraj-ud-Daula had forced them out of Calcutta while the English were locked in conflict with their French rivals in southern India. More pointedly, the example of the *khatri* disciples of Guru Nanak left chroniclers with the distinct impression that Sikh doctrines were generally compatible with a liberal idea of progress, which was itself rooted in the expansion of commerce.

Later, as their trade networks shifted inland, the English were brought a lot closer to traditional Sikh centers in eastern cities such as Patna. Although the English fixed a western limit to their territories, Shah Alam II still faced native rivals in the Marathas, whose bid for the Mughal scepter was foiled by the even more resolute Afghans at the Battle of Panipat in 1761. The outcome at Panipat allowed the previously frustrated Sikhs to realize in substantial measure their own ambitions in the Punjab. On capturing the citadel of Lahore in 1765, the Sikhs minted their own coin as a sign of their sovereignty. Between 1765 and 1784, while the India Question was the subject of heated metropolitan debates occupying the attention of liberal radicals such as Diderot and Adam Smith, the Sikh armies were pressing on Delhi, which brought them to the attention of the English. Even so, the English made only a handful of passing references to the Sikhs, the first of which was in Alexander Dow's *History of*

*Hindustan* (1768). His comments focused on the growing strength of the confederacies that constituted the Sikh commonwealth but also touched on their faith, which Dow characterized as a Deist doctrine "without any mixture of either the Mahommedan or Hindoo superstitions." He also noted that as the Mughal Empire had started to decline, the Sikhs had "prodigiously increased their numbers" by permitting "proselytes of all religions, without any ceremony other than an oath, which they tender to them, to oppose monarchy." [12] French contemporaries such as the Jesuit nuncio Francis Xavier Wendel and A.H.L. Polier also contributed to expanding the knowledge about the Sikhs, judging them as a group not yet able to achieve the kind of united sovereignty required to afford full scope to commerce in the Punjab nor the artillery strength to challenge the English or the French. [13] If taken as a whole, these earliest reports were intended to lead their readers to the conclusion that although the Sikhs had crushed the spiritual despotism of the Brahmanical orders, the future of their commonwealth was limited by the feudal nature of their polity. Still, in 1784, as the news reached India that a bill in Parliament to reform or revoke the EIC charter had failed, Governor-General Warren Hastings called on English commanders to counter the "predatory incursions" by the Sikhs. [14]

The year 1784 also marks another watershed: the creation of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. At least since the late 1770s, philologically inclined administrators such as Hastings, William Jones, and others had fueled a new mania for Indian thought, which was gripping learned men of the Enlightenment on both sides of the Channel in the expectation of an Oriental renaissance. [15] However, built as it was on the revivification of Sanskrit classics, this mania tended to overlook the textual tradition at the heart of Sikhism. After penning a description of a service at a Sikh temple from Patna in 1781, Charles Wilkins, the pioneering Sanskritist who translated the *Bhagavad Gītā*, apparently never followed through on an offer to commission copies of the Sikh scriptures for closer review. [16] On a similar note, based on some aide-mémoire on the Sikhs that a French officer in Awadh had submitted, the

famed orientalist A. H. Anquetil Du Perron had written of possibly applying himself to translate “a Moorish life” of Guru Nanak collected for the royal French library sometime in the late 1770s, although the intention was never realized. [17] It was the same Du Perron, in fact, whose 1771 translation of the *Zendavesta* was lambasted as inauthentic by none other than William “Asiatick” Jones (credited with proving that there was link between Sanskrit and Greek and Latin) at least a couple of centuries before Edward Said criticized Anquetil Du Perron as the archetype of the western scholar who conflated the actual Orient with its simulacrum. If the first orientalists were somewhat incurious, there were plenty of other observers who completed sketches of the Sikhs in this era, the best examples of which include James Browne’s *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks* [sic] (1788) and George Forster’s letter on the Sikhs in *A Journey From Bengal to England* (1798). Taken together, these writings offered impressionistic and incomplete but nonetheless sympathetic accounts of Sikh belief that illuminated many aspects social life in the Punjab, the historical circumstances that led the Mughals to repress the Sikh faith, the triumph of the Sikhs over their rivals, the theological divide between the heterodox devotees of Guru Nanak and the orthodox Sikhs who belonged to the Khalsa brotherhood, the systems of revenue collection under Sikh rulers, the state of commerce in Sikh-controlled areas, the development of native gunsmithery and manufactures, and the imperfect republic of the Sikh confederacies.

The Sikhs eventually came to figure more prominently in the calculus of the English but only after about 1800 when the wave of enthusiasm for Oriental civilization turned into its opposite – a turnaround that was itself symptomatic of the fact that the British had retreated from the task of projecting a liberal empire in India. The collapse of a liberal vision of empire, which itself followed the intense reaction to the French Revolution in England, framed the Orientalist-Anglicist debate in England that culminated in the fight in Parliament in 1813 over whether to allow Christian proselytizing in India – which the Anglicists then won. The Orientalist-Anglicist debate also cast its

shadow over the English view of the Sikhs. Anglicists such as William Ward, [18] a Baptist minister who headed the Mission Press in the Danish settlement at Serampore that cast some of the first types for Indian vernaculars, were apparently invested in questioning the idea held by some orientalists at the time that Sikhism was a Deist religion that stood in the same “kind of relation to Hindoo religion, which Protestant does to the Romish.” [19] But the issue was never so simple as one of denying the similarities between Sikhism and Protestantism or spreading the Gospel to the Sikhs or the Hindus; rather, as the involvement of the historian James Mill on the side of the Anglicist cause in a critical review of John Malcolm’s 1812 “Sketch of the Sikhs” made clear, there were liberal reasons to object to the idea that India had to be ruled in the authoritative idiom of native custom. [20] Malcolm, who later wrote a sympathetic biography of Lord Clive, was by no means a liberal, nor was Mill a cryptoconservative, but such was the ideological confusion of the age as the categories inherited from a Whiggish tradition were tested against the challenges that arose from the administration of a cosmopolitan empire. What is salient is that it was the orientalists who retreated from the idea that liberal categories were universally applicable, promoting instead the cause of paternalistically governing the Indian subjects of the English crown through the defense of custom.

Throughout the reign of Maharajah Ranjit Singh (1799–1839), there were numerous new portrayals of the Sikhs authored by a host of different characters. These English, French, and German accounts – some of which remain to be translated – offer a different view of the Sikh state than what is available in vernacular sources such as the official state orders or the chronicles of the royal diarist. It was these sojourners, as it were, who analyzed the socioeconomic reforms that were instituted under Maharajah Ranjit Singh, which included opening up the Indus to English commerce, displacing feudal levies with a regular army, and generating a labor market in soldiers who collected a fixed wage based on state revenues farmed in cash. But since the Maharajah was himself so heterodox in matters of religion there was little that was new written about Sikh

doctrine. Instead, writers at the royal court made important observations about the ways in which the Sikhs were practicing their religion and contributed to the growing admiration of the Sikhs as a ‘martial race,’ an orientalist stereotype that many Sikhs would later appropriate for their own ends to find employment in the British and later the Indian army. [21] English orientalism hit its high-water mark just before the fall of the last independent Sikh state in the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848–1849) with the appearance of Horace Hayman Wilson’s lecture “A Summary Account of the Civil and Religious Institutions of the Sikhs” (1846) in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1848) and J.D. Cunningham’s *History of the Sikhs* (1849).

After the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the new administration favored the commission of a major orientalist endeavor, a complete translation of the Sikh scriptures. Yet, while the India Office temporized in its allocation of funds, after a wave of financial crises rocked the empire, the winds had shifted away from the English scholar-administrators in the direction of continental scholars attempting to establish Indological studies as a *Wissenschaft* (science). After more than a decade of indecision, in 1869 the India Office hired Ernest Trumpp, an adept linguist near Stuttgart with a theological grounding and first-hand experience in Sindh. No doubt Trumpp was thankful for the commission, as someone whose liberal sympathies as a seminararian (at the same *Stift* where Hegel studied) in the course of the 1848 revolutions were still proving, decades later, an obstacle to gaining a full academic appointment, but Trumpp quickly found himself frustrated by the arduousness of the task. [22] His 1877 translation, the first of its kind, was incomplete but supplemented by learned essays on the curious use of case markers in the *Adī Granth* (the first book of scripture) as well as the use of different meters in its verses. And it was the first work to make use of a previously unidentified hagiographical narrative of the life of Guru Nanak written in 1635 that Trumpp had found at the India Office in the collection of the EIC administrator-Sanskritist H.T. Colebrooke. Despite its relative merits, the

Sikh revivalists of the time were unanimous in their condemnation of the enterprise, questioning both the quality of the translation as well as the conclusions Trumpp had reached about Sikhism as a religion on the wane, purportedly due to its nihilistic worldview. But it was the section on the philosophy of the Sikh religion in which Sikhism was characterized as a monistic doctrine that argues the universe is cloaked in *māyā* (which Trumpp translated as “deception”) that particularly rankled Sikh revivalists. Trumpp had affirmed, in short, the Vedantic interpretation of Sikh scripture that was favored by clerics of the Nirmala order, whom the Singh Sabha revivalists saw as heretical. However, in rejecting this kind of nihilism, Trumpp was responding as much to the claims of the Sikh revivalists that Sikhism had an idealist strain that made it distinct from the Hindu traditions as to the embrace of an eastern strain of nihilism by German Romantics, specifically the idea that the relationship of freedom and nature was veiled in *māyā* (illusion), giving the “will” an illusion of agency, as articulated in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. [24] The more reform-minded revivalists – the ones who later affected a schism within the Singh Sabha societies – affirmed the view that the Sikh religion accepted no sects and was emphatically monotheistic and its theology taught that a devotee should abandon attachments to the finite universe and the ego in order to realize that *māyā* is not simply “deception” but rather that which obfuscates the truth that the universe is a continuous act of creation. A divisional judge in the Punjab involved in the growing Orientalist societies promoting vernacular education, Max Arthur Macauliffe, tried undo the affront to the Sikhs, pleading in vain to officers in the Punjab administration that the Trumpp translation constituted an *odium theologicum*, before publishing *The Sikh Religion* (1909), which ran into six volumes. The controversies over the Trumpp translation lingered well after Kahn Singh Nabha articulated the Sikh claim *Ham Hindū Nahīn* (We are not Hindus [1898]), but the idea that the translation was politically efficacious to the English even in a subtly oblique manner was never central to the debate.



## The Historiographical Impasse in Contemporary Sikh Studies

The dominant frameworks in Sikh studies for parsing the ideological content of orientalism continue to rely on a binarized opposition of colonizer/colonized. A correlative insistence on an ethical anti-imperialist stance confuses the issue of why the authors of apparently sympathetic sketches of the Sikhs sometimes favored colonialism. Yet, this insistence can only be substantiated by ignoring the deeply contested debates that attended the major historical transformations in the empire – even the fact of empire itself – or by positing a transhistorical western “will-to-power” over the Orient. It seems commonplace within Sikh studies that the category of religion was transposed from orientalist discourse to “the imposition of a dominant symbolic order on indigenous cultures [that was] implemented by a vast network of Anglo-vernacular mission schools and maintained by a newly imposed capitalist economy.” [25] Arvind Mandair offers an even more robust version of this argument, however, by pointing out that the ethical stance of the scholarship that had tried to open a space of subaltern or native agency in the wake of *Orientalism* was itself complicit in reproducing rather than eclipsing antinomies of colonial thought. Postcolonial scholarship, in other words, displaces religion with “a secular anti-imperialist critique,” which “simply reinstate[s] the Hegelianism that it set out to remove.” [26] This antihistoricist strain, which runs counter to the mainstream scholarly interpretation of Hegel, also stands in acute contrast to the work of the nationalist scholars of the 1950s whose efforts resulted in many invaluable collections of painstakingly edited official documents, new researches into the canonization of the Sikh scriptures, an ambitious encyclopedia of Sikhism, and a number of landmark studies of Sikh rule in the Punjab. Although these scholars tended to obscure the historical specificity of their own peculiarly modern interpretation of the Sikh tradition, their works, like those of the Sikh revivalists, nevertheless maintained an open dialogue with the colonial-era archive with the aim of clarifying “the muddle of modernity.” [27] It is important to

remember that it was the task of apprehending their own peculiarly modern lifeworlds that necessitated concepts that, despite their indisputably western origins had nevertheless also come to be their own as a consequence of their *plausibility*, rather than as the direct function of class interest, colonial pedagogy, or colonial institutions.

## References

1. Ballantyne T (2006) Between colonialism and diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world. Duke University Press, Durham
2. Axel B (2001) The nation's tortured body: violence, representation, and the formation of the Sikh diaspora. Duke University Press, Durham
3. Said EW (1978) Orientalism. Vintage Books, New York
4. Chakrabarty D (2000) Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton University Press, Princeton
5. Inden R (1986) Orientalist constructions of India. *Modern Asian Studies* 20 #3:401–446
6. Asad T (1993) Genealogies of religion. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
7. McLeod WH (1999) Discord in the Sikh Panth. *J Am Orient Soc* 119 #3:381–389
8. Sartori A (2008) Bengal in global concept history: culture in the age of capital. University of Chicago, Chicago
9. Singh G (ed) (1962) Early European accounts of the Sikhs. *Indian Studies Past & Present*, Calcutta. Also: Madra AS, Paramjit S (eds) (2004) *Siques, tigers, or thieves: eyewitness accounts of the Sikhs, 1606–1809*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
10. Letter to Robert Hedges, Governor of Fort William in Bengal, of March 10, 1716. In: Madra AS, Paramjit S (eds) (2004) *Siques, tigers, or thieves: eyewitness accounts of the Sikhs, 1606–1809*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
11. Mill J (1817) *History of British India*, vol 4. Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, London
12. Dow A (1768) *History of the Mogul Empire*. In: *The history of Hindostan*, vol 2. T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, London, p 82
13. Polier A-L (1801[1776]) Extracts of letters from Major Polier at Delhi to Colonel at Belgram, May 22, 1996. *Asiatic Annu Regis Year* 1800:29–41
14. Hastings in *Siques, tigers, or thieves: eyewitness accounts of the Sikhs, 1606–1809* (2004), 63–66
15. Trautmann TR (1997) *Aryans and British India*. University of California Press, Berkeley. Also see: Schwab R (1984[1950]) *The oriental renaissance: Europe's rediscovery of the India and the east, 1680–1880*. Columbia University Press, New York
16. Wilkins C (1788[1781]) *The seeks and their college at Patna*. *Asiatick Res* 1:288–294

17. Duperron AAH (2004) In: Madra AS, Paramjit S (eds) *Siques, tigers, or thieves: eyewitness accounts of the Sikhs, 1606–1809*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
18. Ward W (1811) *Account of the Sikhs*. In: *Account of the writings, religion, and manners of the Hindoos*, vol 4. Mission Press, Serampore
19. Browne JM (1788) *An history of the origin and progress of the sicks*. Logographic Press, London, p iv
20. Mill J (1813) Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*. *Eclectic Rev* 10:77–87
21. Fox R (1985) *Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making*. University of California, Berkeley
22. Schimmel A (1981) Ernest Trumpp. In: *German contributions to the study of Indo-Pakistani linguistics*. German-Paksitan Forum, Hamburg
23. Pinkard T (2002) *German philosophy, 1760–1860: the legacy of idealism*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
24. Trumpp E (1877) *The Ādi Granth or the holy scriptures of the Sikhs*. N. Trübner, London
25. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York, p 175
26. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York, p 109
27. Chakrabarty D (2011) The muddle of modernity. *Am Hist Rev* 116 #3:663–675

---

# P

---

## Pagri

- [Turban \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Parchar

- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Performance

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Persian Literature

- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Persian Sources (and Literature) on Sikhs

Christopher Shackle  
SOAS, University of London, London, UK

### Definition

Sikh literature written in Persian; Persian sources for Sikh history.

### Persian in India

Already established as the main language of eastern Islam, Persian was brought to India by the Muslim invaders of the early medieval period. By the time of the Mughal empire, Persian was fully established across northern India as the dominant language of the court and the imperial administration. Persian was extensively used both for routine record-keeping and for formal historical writing, as well as being the vehicle of a large poetic literature ranging from elaborate courtly genres to more popular Sufi lyrics. While

a thorough education in Persian literature was an essential component in the upbringing of members of the Muslim elite, a training in the language was also important to the non-Muslim scribal castes like the Khatri of the Punjab who serviced the administrative structures of the empire.

Aspects of this long and complex presence of Persian in India, which also included the adoption of very significant numbers of Persian loanwords into Indian languages, are variously reflected in writings related to Sikhism from the period before the British conquest, after which Persian was very quickly replaced as the written language of the elite by English. The following chronological survey covers both Persian texts of direct Sikh inspiration and historical accounts of the Sikhs written in Persian by outsiders.

### Persian in the *Adi Granth*

The *jamasa* stories of Guru Nanak's early life report that as a boy he was taught Persian, and this would have been an important part of his training as an administrator. The most significant reflection of the founder of Sikhism's familiarity with Persian emerges from an analysis of his core religious terminology [11], as recorded in his hymns in the *Adi Granth* (AG). Along with many well-established Indic elements, this includes a notably high number of Persian words relating to secular kingship which are creatively adapted to serve Guru Nanak's new theology. These include such familiar Sikh terms as *patisah* "king," *sahib* "lord," and *khasam* "master" as names of God, besides *takht* "throne" or *darbar* and *dargah* "court" as designations of the divine abode, also such notable adaptations in meaning as the use of *hukam* "command" to denote the divine order, of *rajai* "approval" to describe the divine will, or of *nadar* "look of favor" to refer to the operation of divine grace. While equally frequent in the hymns of Guru Amar Das, this Persian terminology is notably less often employed by the later Gurus.

Guru Nanak was also the author of a few hymns composed wholly or partly in Persian, the most notable being that in Rag Tilang beginning *yak araj guphatam pesi to* "I have made an

entreaty unto You" (AG721), which is the apparent inspiration for another Persian hymn by Guru Arjan (AG722).

### Early Persian Sources on the Sikhs

Only with the increased prominence of the community under Guru Arjan did the Sikhs begin to receive occasional mention in Persian sources ([8], pp. 55–84; [13]). The earliest of these is in the *Akbarnama*, the history of Akbar's reign compiled by his close associate Abul Fazl, which records the emperor's friendly visit to Goindwal on November 4, 1598, in response to an invitation by Guru Arjan, who is briefly but mistakenly described as "a leader of the Brahmanical faith."

A much more hostile notice of Guru Arjan is found in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the autobiographical memoirs compiled by Jahangir, who succeeded his father Akbar in 1605. In a deservedly well-known paragraph, the emperor mordantly records his long-held suspicion of the Guru's activities, in particular his conversions of Muslims, and of having him arrested after Arjan had apparently supported the unsuccessful bid for the throne made by Jahangir's son Khusrau.

Contemporary imperial sources of the seventeenth century are subsequently silent on the Sikhs, but there is a quite extended account in the Persian *Dabistan-i-mazahib* ("The School of religions"), once attributed to Muhsin Fani but now believed to have been written around 1650 by the Zoroastrian priest Kaikhusrau Isfandiyar, who had traveled extensively in India and had investigated numerous religious groups at first hand. As the only early independent source, his description of the Sikhs, whom he refers to as "Nanak panthis," provides a usefully authentic check on the fuller but often much later internal evidence of the Sikh sources. Correctly identifying the importance of Khatri and Jat in the community, the *Dabistan* provides a summary account of the early Gurus with lengthier notices of Guru Hargobind and of Guru Har Rai. The author claims to have known the latter particularly well and tells several stories of his followers.

## Bhai Nand Lal Goya

The extensive writings of the tenth and last Sikh Guru Gobind Singh and the literary court associated with him are collected in the Dasam Granth. This includes some Persian poetry, notably the important verse epistle called the *Zafarnama* [see separate EIR entry *Zafarnama*]. A much more extensive corpus of Persian verse was composed by Guru Gobind Singh's disciple Bhai Nand Lal Goya. While not included in the Dasam Granth, this formally enjoys a quasi-canonical status like that of the somewhat earlier Punjabi and Hindi poetry of Bhai Gurdas and is similarly sanctioned for Sikh temple recitation, even though it is nowadays less widely known due the modern community's general unfamiliarity with Persian, while its preservation in the Gurmukhi script has largely prevented its being known to a non-Sikh readership.

Bhai Nand Lal (1633–c.1710) was born in Afghanistan into a Hindu Khatri family ([4, 5], pp. 198–276). His professional training in Persian subsequently led to his employment in the secretariat of various Indian Muslim notables, including the Mughal prince Muazzam (later Bahadur Shah I) who was on friendly terms with Guru Gobind Singh. Becoming one of the Guru's closest disciples, Nand Lal's personal devotion to him is celebrated in several of his poems. Exemplifying between them most of the classic Persian poetic genres, his poems use the familiar language of Persian Sufi poetry to convey the message of loving Sikh devotionism ([1, 14, 16], pp. 133–157).

His best known work is his *Divan* [3], a collection of lyrics bearing the poetic signature Goya ("Speaker") in the form of 61 *ghazals*, the most popular of all forms of Persian poetry, and 19 shorter *rubais* (quatrains). He also wrote several longer works in the form of the *masnavi*, a poem in rhyming couplets which is the classic Persian genre for narrative and mystical subjects. The longest is the *Zindaginama* ("Book of Life") in 510 verses, which is a recasting of the teachings of the early Gurus recorded in Punjabi and Hindi in the Adi Granth into the Persian poetic language of the Sufis, so that, e.g., the word *murshid* "guide"

normally denoting a Sufi spiritual director is used to refer to the Guru. This ambitious poem's key themes are the need for loving devotion, including the practice of congregational worship and the glorification of the Guru. Praise of each of the ten Sikh Gurus is the subject of Nand Lal's *Ganjnama* ("Treasure book") in 160 verses, whose final third is devoted to a famous lengthy encomium of Guru Gobind Singh. A similar subject is addressed in the *Joti bigas* ("Display of the light") in 175 verses extolling the divine light manifested first in Guru Nanak then in the following Gurus.

## Later Persian Sources on the Sikhs

Another Persian poem associated with Guru Gobind Singh, but certainly not by him, is the unusual *Amarnama* ("Commandment book") [10], written in the same meter as the *Zafarnama*. This begins with the story of the Guru's first meeting with Banda Bahadur and ends with his telling the Sikhs to have no faith in Brahmans but to listen reverently to the singing of Dhadi minstrels ([9], pp. 91–144).

With the rise of the Khalsa around 1700, there is an exponential rise in the coverage of the Sikhs in non-Sikh historical sources, where Persian remained the preferred language down to the time of the British conquests. Key passages of the most important texts [13] are now mostly available in English translation ([8], pp. 110–211). Most of these prose Persian histories were compiled by *munshis* working in the administration and of other provincial authors. Their record of contemporary events is generally more valuable than their less reliable accounts of earlier periods [6].

There are important if tantalizingly brief references to Guru Gobind Singh in the contemporary official record of Aurangzeb's reign entitled *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*, while there is a rather lengthier coverage including an overview of earlier Sikh history in the *Khulasat ut tavarikh* completed in 1696 by the *munshi* Sujan Rai Bhandari of Batala. The spectacularly successful challenge to Mughal authority by Banda Bahadur made a great impression on contemporary writers. It is recorded at



some length in several Persian histories compiled by Muslim writers at the time, notably including the *Ibratnama* by Muhammad Qasim of Lahore, another *Ibratnama* by Mirza Muhammad Harisi, the *Tazkirat us salatin chaghata* by Muhammad Hadi Kamvar Khan, and the *Muntakhab ul lubab* by Khafi Khan. The generally less vivid record of the chaotic events of the mid-eighteenth century is enlivened by the Persian verse *Jangnama* by Qazi Nur Muhammad [12], which is the only major source for Ahmad Shah Durrani's seventh invasion of 1764–1765 and is notable for the reluctant respect paid to the Sikhs' fighting qualities by its strongly anti-Sikh author. It was later cited at some length in the footnotes to Bhai Vir Singh's famous novel *Sundari*, one of the landmarks of the Punjabi literary renaissance.

With the coming to power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r. 1799–1839), the Sikh kingdom came to take on many of the traditional features of earlier Mughal administration, including the use of Persian as the official language of the Lahore Darbar. Official records were one of the primary sources used by the *munshi* Sohan Lal Suri for his *Umdat ut Tavarikh*, modeled on Bhandari's earlier *Khulasat ut tavarikh*. The *Umdat ut tavarikh* [15] is an immense work, originally filling 7,000 pages in the shorthand Persian *shikasta* script. Covering the whole period 1469–1849, it is mainly valuable for its detailed contemporary account of the reigns of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors. Many other Persian works devoted to this period notably include the prose *Zafarnama-yi Ranjit Singh* by Divan Amar Nath, the son of the Maharaja's finance minister, and a work of the same title in grandiose Persian verse by Kanhaiya Lal.

Finally, there are histories of the Sikhs compiled in Persian for the information of British officials as the British and Sikh worlds came to confront one another. Although often inaccurate, these histories remain interesting as key examples of the mechanics of transfer of cultural knowledge in the common language of the time. They include the *Risala dar ahval-i Nanak Shah Darvesh* (1784) written by Budh Singh for Major James Browne, the East India Company's representative in Delhi (whose own pioneering account in English was published as *An history of the rise*

*and progress of the Sicks* in 1788), and the *Tavarikh-i ahval-i Sikhian* (1812) written in Batala by Khushvaqt Rai for Colonel Ochterlony [2]. There are also two notable histories written at the end of the period in the 1840s: the interesting *Chahar Bagh-i Panjab* compiled by the *munshi* Ganesh Das of Gujrat [7] and the *Tarikh-i-Panjab* commissioned from Ghulam Muhiyuddin "Bute Shah" by Captain Murray, the Company's officer in Ludhiana, who was also the addressee of the *Prachin panth prakash*, the famous rival account of the Sikhs' heroic age in Hindi-Panjabi verse completed in 1841 by Ratan Singh Bhangu.

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Banda Bahadur](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Historical Sources \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)
- [Tegh Bahadur \(Guru\)](#)
- [Zafarnama](#)

## References

1. Bawa US (trans) (2006) Biography and writings of Bhai Sahib Bhai Nand Lal ji (English translation). Washington Sikh Center, Gaithersburg
2. Dhavan P (2007) Redemptive pasts and imperiled futures: the writing of a Sikh history. *Sikh Form* 3:113–124
3. Fenech LE (1994) Persian Sikh scripture: the ghazals of Bha'i Nand La'l Goya. *Int J Punjab Stud* 1:49–70
4. Fenech LE (2004) Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya' and the Sikh tradition. In: Singh P, Barrier NG (eds) *Sikhism and history*. OUP, New Delhi
5. Fenech LE (2008) *The darbar of the Sikh gurus*. OUP, New Delhi
6. Grewal JS (1976) *Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Persian chroniclers*. GNDU, Amritsar
7. Grewal JS, Banga I (trans) (1975) Early nineteenth century Panjab, from Ganesh Das's *Char bagh-i Panjab*. GNDU, Amritsar
8. Grewal JS, Habib I (2004) *Sikh history from Persian sources*. Fiction House, Lahore
9. Padam PS (ed) (1989) *Zafarnama te panj hor name*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
10. Rani, Kavita (2008) *Amarnama*. Patiala Gurmat Prakashan

11. Shackle C (1978) Approaches to the Persian loans in the Adi Granth. BSOAS 41:73–96
12. Singh G (ed) (1939) Nur Muhammad, Jang namah. Khalsa College, Amritsar
13. Singh G (ed) (1949) Ma'akhiz-i tavarikh-i sikkhan. Sikh History Society, Amritsar
14. Singh G (ed) (1982) Bhai Nand Lal granthavali. Punjabi University, Patiala
15. Suri SL (1961) An outstanding source of Panjab history: Umdat-ut-tawarikh (trans: Suri VS). S. Chand, Delhi
16. Talib GS (1984) Studies in Indian poetry. Panjab University, Chandigarh

---

## Philosophy

### ► Logic (Sikhism)

---

## Philosophy (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

Gurmat; Darshan; Dharam; Parchar; Viakhia;  
Vichar

## Definition

A mode of thinking which operates primarily through the process of defining concepts and categories inherent within the teachings of the Sikh Gurus that pertain to fundamental questions regarding creation, the self, the world, language, and the very idea of knowing. Sikh philosophy is inherently self-reflexive and emerges from conceptual frameworks inherent in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus therefore adapting them to the lived experience of individual Sikhs and to different cultural environments and for conceptually engaging non-Sikh culture acts as a positivistic and productive endeavor.

## Introduction

Why “Sikh philosophy”? What exactly does the term “Sikh philosophy” designate? One often hears of “Buddhist philosophy” or “Hindu philosophy” for which there are well-established indigenous traditions and famous exegetes. But rarely does one hear the term “Sikh philosophy.” It is almost never used by Western scholars of Sikh studies, whose preference has been for the cognate term “Sikh theology” [3, 4]. By contrast one almost never hears of “Buddhist theology” or “Hindu theology.” This may be because there are indigenous categories (*darshanas* and *shastras* in the Hindu context or *dhamma/dharma* in Buddhist context) that broadly correspond to the Western category of “philosophy.” Yet the Sikh lexicon has similar categories such as *dharam* (signifying moral order) and especially the term *gurmat* (which refers to the instruction or teaching of the Guru), which can claim correspondence to “philosophy.” But this raises two questions. First, why the preference for “Sikh theology” in much of modern Sikh studies scholarship? Second, is “Sikh philosophy” anything other than a secularized version of Sikh theology?

To answer the first question, categories such as *gurmat*, *dharam*, etc., took on a theological significance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the attempt of Singh Sabha scholars to erect definitive boundaries between an emergent and politically active Hinduism and the Sikh tradition, by constituting *Sikhi(sm)* as an entity that corresponded to the Western definition of proper religion. They did this by reformulating the idea of direct inner experience that is so central to the teaching of Sikh scriptures, in terms of a revelation from a personal God. No doubt there are secondary sources such as the *Puratan Janamsakhi* which present Guru Nanak’s attainment of spiritual perfection in terms of the revelation model [8, 13]. The Singh Sabha scholars Christianized the *janamsakhi* version of the Sultanpur experience by formulating extensive written commentaries on Sikh scripture in the form of proofs for the existence of God. The purpose of these commentaries was to ideologically separate what they considered as Sikh

“revelation” from the impersonal Vedic revelation based on an eternal cosmic sound. The problem with the *janamsakhi*/revelation model is twofold, however. First, while Guru Nanak himself says nothing about *this* pivotal experience at Sultanpur, he does say a great deal about how direct experience and spiritual perfection can be attained by anybody and at anytime. It is a theme that is repeatedly stressed in the *Adi Granth* by his successor Gurus, and their emphasis is not on hearing voices from God but on changing the nature of the human mind. Secondly, the *Puratan Janamsakhi* is itself not at all consistent about the revelation model. Read closely, one can find strong suggestions of other, nontheological (or simply philosophical) ways of explaining direct experience or attainment of perfection that are far more consistent with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as we find them in the *Adi Granth*. The emphasis here is on *explaining* or better still *interpreting*, which should give us a hint as to why I prefer the term “Sikh philosophy” over “Sikh theology,” even though both have inherent limitations.

The main limitation of categories such as “philosophy” and “theology” stems from the fact that they function only by first transplanting the indigenous concepts into a very different conceptual soil and therefore are totally dependent on the function of representation. As a mode of explanation or interpretation Sikh philosophy does not remain in thrall to its “original” context, nor, paradoxically, does it ever lose sight of that “original” context. “Sikh theology” could not do this because it worked within the constraints of the peculiarly Western discourse of ontotheology. The term “ontotheology” is a hugely misunderstood term especially in conventional Sikh and South Asian studies. The term combines three terms: *ontos*, *theos*, and *logos* referring to three historical discourses: (i) the Greek philosophy of being (*ontos*), (ii) the Christian discourse on the nature of God (*theos*), and (iii) the humanistic/atheistic discourse of reason (*logos*). The terms combine in the medieval period giving rise to the tradition of ontotheology which outwardly claims that the foundation of human reason is apparently a transcendent God, but in reality, God’s transcendence becomes subservient to human reason

and the secret mechanism behind secularism. Ontotheology is therefore a key mechanism in the rise of modern secularism and in the privatizing of religion. Understood in this way, one can see that ontotheology effectively subsumes much of modern Sikh thinking and practice. This ontotheological self-definition of *Sikhi*(sm) has never been challenged by modern Western Sikh studies which in fact accepts it in order, ironically, to more firmly establish the historicoanthropological, i.e., secular, domain of Sikh studies. After its encounter with the West, modern *Sikhi*(sm) could therefore only develop in one direction – culturally, politically, and intellectually [2].

In answer to the second question, the simple answer is that “Sikh philosophy” is far from a secularized theology. Unlike other disciplines philosophy has the capacity to self-reflexively engage with its own categories in such a way that it is able to refuse the very distinction between religion and the secular that is so entrenched in the Western system of thought. My contention is that there is already a living system of Sikh reasoning and thought. It is not difficult to show that this indigenous mode of thinking has and continues to resist the religion-secular distinction, despite the Singh Sabha’s religious apologetic. Many Sikh writers, including Puran Singh in the early twentieth century [6, 11] and Harinder Singh Mehboob in the late twentieth century [5] or prominent *kathakars* such as Sant Singh Maskin or Darshan Singh Ragi, exemplify this tendency toward the “philosophical” defined primarily through concepts and categories inherent within the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Because of its inherent self-reflexivity Sikh philosophy has much greater potential for evolving conceptual frameworks for interpreting the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, adapting them to the lived experience of individual Sikhs and to different cultural environments and for conceptually engaging non-Sikh cultures.

But before turning our attention to what these concepts might look like, we need to consider two further objections to the term “Sikh philosophy.” The obvious one is that philosophy is a western discipline and therefore unsuited both for the study of Sikh literature and of the Sikh lifeworld. This may be rebutted on the grounds that

philosophy is no more Western than sociology, history, anthropology, or other disciplines whose presence is now well established in Sikh studies. In fact the field of Sikh studies can itself be considered a form of ongoing engagement with the West, one that began in the colonial period and whose mark is firmly imprinted in all literature influenced by Singh Sabha scholarship [2]. This encounter with Western thought and its categories is as much a reality for those who think and write in Punjabi as it is for those who write in English. If anything, “philosophy” provides better access to understanding the framework and mechanisms of this encounter.

A second objection may be that one of the primary sources for Sikh philosophy, the *Adi Granth*, is not set out as a philosophical treatise or legal codes to be read silently but as poetry intended to be sung or recited individually or in groups [7]. While the range and power of these teachings are immediately evident to those who participate in the practice such as *kirtan* and *nam simaran*, the aesthetic framing of the hymns in the classical *raga* and *tala* of North Indian music poses some resistance to any formal systemization, for example, in the form of philosophical conceptualization [11, 12]. This is especially the case when we try to render the content of these teachings in modern English, although modern Punjabi is no less problematic. It could therefore be argued that there is nothing to think about since the literature is purely devotional. If so, then surely the term “Sikh theology” is the most suitable frame whether one likes it or not?

The rebuttal to this argument is relatively straightforward. Firstly, it should not be forgotten that the lives of some of the greatest exponents of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy (e.g., Sankara, Ramanuja, Nagarjuna, Candrakirti, Shinran, etc.) were grounded in devotional practices of different kinds. It is therefore mistaken, certainly within the Indian context, to think of philosophy and devotion as totally different practices. Unlike the Western notion of philosophy (which succumbed to the religion-secular distinction following the separation between Church and State), in the Indic context philosophy and devotion are completely intertwined. Secondly, the source literature is

indeed poetic in nature, but there is a vast body of secondary literature that expounds and explicates the teachings of the *Adi Granth* through *modes of reasoning* that happen to be current in any social context [1]. Moreover, there are well-established and vibrant living traditions of oral exegesis of the *Adi Granth* (often simply referred to as *gurmat vichar* or *gurbani viakhia*) that also expound its core teachings, again using modes of reasoning that are conventional at any particular time and social context. While these traditions are not doing “philosophy” in the strictly academic sense of the term, they do perform a certain kind of conceptualization that helps ordinary Sikhs to think about, to reflect upon, important aspects of the Gurus’ teachings and to relate them to the everyday world that they live in, that is, to their lived experience. This work of thinking about (*vichar*, *viakhia*), which inevitably involves forms of public reasoning, suggests that an implicit philosophical endeavor has always been underway since the time of the Sikh Gurus, one that became more explicit in the work of modern Sikh scholars. Sikh philosophy is therefore superior in that it links Sikh subjectivity or lived experience directly to the task of interpreting Sikh scripture on a daily basis.

## The Authority of Experience

Having raised and answered these objections, we are in a better position to gauge what the basic elements of Sikh philosophy might be, including, of course, a possible starting point. The problem of finding a starting point is no trivial matter, for it is connected to the question of authority of a particular discourse, in this case the discourse of Sikh philosophy. Fortunately the question of authority is fairly well established in the writings of the Sikh Gurus and especially in Guru Nanak’s most important composition, the *Japji* [10]. As early as the first few stanzas of this hymn, it becomes obvious that it is nothing less than Guru Nanak’s own testimony about the nature of his authority and the direct experience that authorizes it. Thus any discourse going by the name “Sikh philosophy” would have to ground itself in

relation to this direct experience and the possibility that others today can experience something similar, here and now. In other words Sikh philosophy would have to locate its authority within an existential as opposed to an epistemological (=transcendental) perspective, which means that what the Sikh Gurus directly experienced, and what they exhorted their followers to try and achieve, was not the experience of a transcendental deity but first and foremost an experience of living within this world – an experience that is strictly within the horizon of life and death, or mortality. This is not to get rid of a personal “God.” Indeed reference to a “personal God” who takes infinite names abounds in the hymns of the Gurus. Rather, it is to suggest that the notion of personal deity is the result of an experience that comes up against the limits of language and should therefore be understood in a radically different way. It means that the object of the Gurus’ teaching (hence the subject matter of what we call Sikh philosophy) is existence itself and that this existence, which is identical to nonexistence, is neither different from nor the same as what we ordinarily term by “God.” The perspective that I am seeking should not only be suited to Sikh and non-Sikh sensibilities alike (it could not be otherwise) but more importantly allow readers to connect their own lived experiences today to the poetry of the Sikh Gurus, to begin to understand why they felt it necessary to produce such writings, and to apply these to the contemporary world.

Perhaps the best way to explain this is to reconsider Guru Nanak’s own testimony on the matter in the first few stanzas of this hymn, where he succinctly outlines the foundational elements of his teaching and any future Sikh philosophy. He begins by elaborating on the nature of the One, which is depicted as a symbol expressive of the nature of reality. His main point about the One is that in order to achieve a perfected awareness of the nature of reality as One, it has to be *experienced* all the time, rather than simply comprehended. Paradoxically, however, the very experience of this One disorients the functioning of what we call “reality.” The experience of the One reveals a gaping hole in our knowledge of the One. In fact, knowledge and experience cannot be

in the same place. To speak about this in conventional language, to bring experience into words, something has to give way. What gives way is our self, or ego, which has to shatter and be reformed but not in the place where it was before. This is the point that Guru Nanak is trying to make in the five stanzas that follow the *mul mantar*, where he goes on to articulate some of the key concepts that become foundational to Sikh philosophy [10].

Evidently then, the work of “Sikh philosophy” cannot simply be located either in the realms of epistemology or ontology in the sense that Western philosophy demarcates these terms [1, 9, 12]. The discourse of “Sikh philosophy,” insofar as we conduct this discourse through Anglophone categories, must therefore be grounded in the encounter between concepts, Sikh and Western and, as we shall see in the following interpretation of the first five stanzas, points to a mode of thinking in which conceptuality is intrinsically linked to affect. In what follows I will try to outline how the basic “philosophical” move made in the first five stanzas – a move which it needs to be stressed is at once affective and conceptual – orients the relationship between *key terms* (such as *hukam*, *nam*, *shabad*, *guru*, *anhad nad*, etc.) and gives rise to *themes* (such as temporality, the nature of consciousness, action and grace, etc.) within the teachings of the Sikh Gurus that are existential-affective as opposed to merely conceptual and therefore speak to a lived existence.

## The One: Experiencing Reality as Nondual

The Japji is recited daily by pious Sikhs, and its opening formula, the *mūl mantar* or foundational statement, is repeatedly invoked in shortened form on almost every page of the Guru Granth Sahib. For Sikhs the *mul mantar* serves as a kind of creedal statement that expresses through rich symbolism the experience undergone by Guru Nanak. Of special importance is the opening phrase *ik oankār* (lit.: One, whose expression emerges as Word) which consists of the numeral 1, a figure that is universally recognizable across cultures and languages and stands for the



Absolute. This is followed by the sign *oan* (lit. the unfolding or emergence of the Word) and completed by the extended sign *kār* which connects *oan* to the next two words in the *mūl mantar*: *sat(i)* (from the Sanskrit *satya* meaning existence or being) followed by *nām* (lit. the Name). The verse following the *mūl mantar* further elaborates the nature of the Absolute One as

Repeat:  
True in the beginning, true before time began  
True even now, Nanak, ever will be true. [10]

However, an important question arises here. If, as Nanak claims, the truth of this Absolute One can be experienced here and now, what is it that stops each and every person from realizing this all the time? What stops us repeating such an experience of the One or of being One? More importantly, *how* could such an experience be repeated?

The answer for Guru Nanak is relatively straightforward. From the standpoint of someone who has actualized Oneness in his or her own existence, the Absolute is One (*ik*) and the One is Absolute. But our normal, everyday consciousness is such that it keeps us fundamentally separated from this One. Our everyday consciousness, which also generates our sense of normality, creates a wall or barrier that prevents us from actualizing Oneness in our lived existence [10]. The cause of this barrier is that we are fundamentally deluded about the true nature of Oneness.

What does this mean? What Nanak seems to be suggesting is that the numeral One is not a numeral among other numerals. Rather, One is simultaneously the most unique and the most deceitful. One is most unique in the sense that there is no other like it insofar as it names the truth of existence itself (*satnām*); it is a “1” that cannot be owned or appropriated and thereby made part of a series of numbers (1 + n). On the other hand, “1” is the most deceitful [10]. This “1” is the basis of knowledge as calculation which evaluates, measures each “1” against every other “1” and thus sets up a difference between them based on this evaluation. It is the “1” that we regard as everyday normality but which is in fact mediated through the structure of the ego, the self which asserts its being on the basis of individuation (*haumai* or self-

attachment as the mechanism of a subject which returns the self to self, generating the sense of “I am my own self” or “I am self-existent”). This oneness makes ego the prior basis of all relationality. The fundamental problem with this “1” is that it projects itself as an infinite proximity between the numeral “1” as the signifier of unity and identity and the word “I” as the signifier of the self’s identity. For Nanak, the correspondence between numeral and word, “1” and “I,” is deceitful insofar as it reproduces this self as an identity that sets itself up in opposition to anything that is different. The ego thereby maintains its existence by erecting barriers against the outside world. It sees itself as a subject fundamentally separated from everything else which becomes an object for it. Nanak likens the subject-object mode of relating to delusion (*bharam*) created by duality (*dubidā*: seeing the “1” as two) [10].

But the problem, as Nanak sees it, goes much further than the simple assumption that the ego is the source of duality/deceit. For as he explains in the first stanza of Japji, from the standpoint of ego, the Absolute “1” cannot be attained either through conceptual thought or through ritual purity no matter how much one repeats such thinking or ritual [10]. Nor can the Absolute “1” be obtained by practicing silent austerities since these too fail to silence the ego’s constant chatter, nor indeed by satisfying one’s innermost cravings [10]. The ego works by routing our experience of the Absolute “1” through all manner of repetition: concepts, rituals, or austerities. Consequently the Absolute “1” always fails to be experienced as such; the nearest we get is to represent it as an object or an idol to constantly gratify the ego’s desire for permanence. Thus, Nanak asks the following questions in the Japji: How then does one overcome egotism? How can the ego’s illusory barriers be broken? How does one become self-realized? [10].

Nanak answers this in the first and second stanzas of Japji. The ego’s boundary is broken by orienting the self toward an imperative that is always already inscribed with(in) the self and within the nature of all existence [10]. Nanak’s name for this imperative is *hukam* – a very simple word that ordinarily means lit. an order or command. But is one to recognize this imperative?

Where is it located? And if it could be located, how does one go about actualizing it? Nanak's answer to these questions is deceptively simple. He states,

*O Nanak, to recognize this imperative (hukam), for it to take effect,  
Let the ego not say: "I am myself". [10]*

**Let the ego not say "I am myself."** Notice here how Nanak insists on two things simultaneously: (i) the emphasis on a certain kind of speech (not saying, the need to avoid saying something) and (ii) a psychic structure, the ego or "I am," corresponding to a certain kind of language use centered around self-possession, so that the psycholinguistic structure in question can be described as an "I am my-self" (*haumai*). But what exactly does this imperative mean: that one should not say I am myself? Is this then an imperative to stay silent, to stop speaking altogether? If so, why would Nanak and other mystics like him want to say so much, as is evident by how much they wrote? In any case Nanak has already mentioned in an earlier stanza that silence is not the answer to his problem. Rather, what Nanak seems to suggest is that there is a *different way* of speaking. To better understand this, it may be helpful to rephrase the imperative as "Let ego *say* I am not" which might then be interpreted as: speak/think/act in such a way that your existence stops revolving around and therefore inscribing the psychic formation "I am my-self" but instead revolves around a different psychic formation: "I am not." In other words, the ego must become silent so that one can resist saying "I am *my*-self" even as ego continues to be formed. For Nanak this silencing of the ego is not to be understood literally. Silence refers to a process of ego loss, a self-enforced withdrawal of ego at the very moment that the self names itself as "I" and thus starts to become an origin or absolute center in relation to all other existing things including others.

So man's fundamental problem, according to Nanak, lies in not understanding the nature of the ego and its intrinsic connection to language. Interestingly, though, he suggests that the remedy to this problem also lies in the very constitution of the ego [10]. If, as we have seen, ego constructs itself by a certain kind of language use (in the form

of self-naming or the assertion of one's existence as the center of all reality: "I am my-self"), Nanak argues that it is also possible for ego to *re-*construct itself by perfecting its relationship to language, thereby perfecting the potential that all humans have for speech/thought/action. A question immediately arises here. How do we go about changing the way we normally relate to language in order to bring about the required change in the constitution of the ego? Note that this is a chicken-and-egg question. For we could equally well ask: how to bring about ego loss in order to effect a change in our relationship to language?

Answers to these questions are not given directly by the Sikh Gurus. More often than not references to language and ego loss are woven into the fabric of their poetic verse. Nevertheless, because of the sheer repetition of these two themes it is possible to formulate the beginnings of a response—a response that will enable us to highlight and briefly discuss some of the leading themes in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. It will be helpful for me to start with the question of ego loss and rejoin the question of language when we discuss the themes.

So how does one go from ego to ego loss? From saying "I am myself" to "I might not be" or "I might not be in possession of my-self"? From the certainty of "I exist" to the uncertainty of "I might not exist"? Is it even practical or useful to ask such a question? Logically speaking, would it not lead us into self-annihilation? Fortunately there is a time-honored way of asking this question without falling into the abyss. The way to do this would be to introduce a modicum of self-doubt into the overconfident assertion of *haumai* (I am my-self), so that one asks instead: *Why* do I exist? For Guru Nanak, to ask the question *why* about one's own self is to have accepted the working of the imperative (*hukam*) that had been inscribed within the self from the moment it came into existence. Indeed, this *hukam* is inscribed in the very nature of existence itself in the form of a universal law: everything that exists must eventually fall into nonexistence. As the law of existence *hukam* governs both cosmos and consciousness at the same time. To recognize and imbibe *hukam* into one's existence in the form of the question "Why do I exist?" as Nanak suggests, begins the process of

decentering the ordinary ego-centric standpoint from where we give meaning to and evaluate all things in relation to our own individual consciousness and our own lives. To recognize *hukam* is to recognize the shortness of life and the ever-presence of death in life.

As the law of impermanence, the inevitability of returning to one's origin, *hukam* is a central category in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus reminding us not only of the mutual imbrications of macrocosm and microcosm, of cosmos and psyche, but also of the ego's confrontation with time. *Hukam* comprises a structure-without-structure around which revolve all other themes in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Some of the larger themes will be introduced below.

## Mind, Consciousness, Ego

If all of existence is sustained by *hukam*, the law of impermanence, then human consciousness (or mind) too is subject to this inexorable law. But as the Sikh Gurus constantly remind us, humans develop a tendency to resist this natural law. Instead of aligning our consciousness with *hukam*, we become attached to worldly things including our own egos, in the process increasing the separation of ego from its source. For Nanak this is man's fundamental problem. Nevertheless, he suggests that the solution to this problem also lies in the very nature and constitution of the ego [10]. How can this be possible?

To grasp what Nanak is saying here it is helpful to look more carefully at the term *man* (pronounced "mun"), which refers to the totality of consciousness prior to its being split through the function of the self-conscious ego and for which the corresponding English terms would be psyche, mind, memory, consciousness, heart, etc. *Man* (or mind) has two aspects for the Sikh Gurus. There is on the one hand the mind-as-ego which causes the split or separation in the first place. As self-conscious, mind-as-ego possesses a discriminatory awareness, a sense of duality which grasps or rejects something external. Fundamentally, it is that which falsely posits another (*dūjā*) as the basis of external reference and

projects itself as the basis of normative reality. From Nanak's perspective, this mind-as-ego is afflicted by a chronic sickness (*dīragh rog*). This happens to be the aspect of mind that calculates, desires, manipulates, flares up in anger, and indulges in negative emotions. It needs to constantly assert and reaffirm its existence by fragmenting, conceptualizing, and solidifying our experience of the temporal world. In fact Nanak refers to the mind-as-ego as *man pardesī* – my mind that has become a foreigner to itself. By creating a defensive boundary around itself it becomes estranged from what Nanak refers to as its true home, its beloved "object," the mind-as-nonego, or simply mind-as-other. Yet even though it is the one estranged from its beloved, the mind-as-ego disavows its own estrangement by positing that from which it is separated as stranger, as the other. In other words it projects its own activity and its guilt onto its other. Though separated by ego activity, however, the two aspects are intimately drawn to each other like lover and beloved. Together these aspects comprise a psychic whole [10].

The split (but ultimately unified) nature of *man* raises questions about the "standpoint" from which Nanak enunciates and particularly to his signature (the proper name "Nanak") which accompanies all of his hymns. Who is it that speaks in these invocations? Precisely to whom is Nanak's utterance addressed? Who is the other of Nanak's speech? Is it God? Is it the reader? The answer to both of these must be an emphatic no! Rather Nanak almost always speaks to his own mind, addressing it at times through tender love as when he says "my beloved mind," at times by cajoling it "my foolish mind," or at other times beseeching it as a lover beseeches her beloved not to leave her. However, because almost every hymn in the Ādi Granth ends with the invocation "O Nanak" the impression may be given that through the use of his proper name, Nanak is signatory to his own words, that these words belong to the person Nanak, thereby marking them with a seal of authority, in which case Nanak's enunciation would be just another form of communication from A to B (where B might be another person, the reader, or God). Closer scrutiny

shows that Nanak's speech is primarily directed to himself, to his own mind. More specifically Nanak's enunciation is invariably directed toward the ego-mind and comes from his unconscious mind (the mind which is at home) as a form of supplication which beseeches his conscious ego-mind (the mind which has become a stranger to itself) to join together in union.

If the ego-mind responds to the supplication of the unconscious mind, it can do so only through the gesture of renunciation. By renouncing its self-naming as "I," it can unite with its (beloved) other from which it has come to be separated. This gesture of withdrawal is deeply traumatic for the ego-mind, for it requires the ego to cross the very barrier which it has erected as its own defence. Such a crossing constitutes a death (ego loss). However, what is absolutely clear in the Gurus' teachings is that they do not advocate any kind of annihilation of the ego or its repression through excessive discipline, for as Nanak says, the ego contains its own cure (*dārū bī is mahi*)! Its cure is contained within it as its most intimate kernel, namely, its beloved other. Because the nature of ego is intrinsically time, the cure involves a struggle not against the world but a struggle to exist within the world while being connected to the Unconscious mind. This struggle, however, can only be waged through the language of love ("Beloved mind, come back to me," etc.). If ego-mind is to come back it must cross its own boundary, and in so doing it must die to itself.

## Action and Grace

Once the nature of ego and time are understood to be intrinsically linked, a rather more interesting and complex picture of ethical action emerges than the stereotypical opposition between a passive *karma* and an active notion of divine grace. For as Guru Nanak states in the Japji, "Through deeds we've done we get this garment [of human existence], through grace we reach the door of liberation" [10]. The Punjabi term for *karma*, as it occurs in the writings of the Sikh Gurus, is *karam*. It has three central connotations. First, it means to do, to perform, accomplish, make, cause, or effect.

Second, when associated with the term *avagavan* (lit. coming and going, the cycle of births and deaths) it stands for fate, destiny, predestination, transmigration, insofar as all of these result from one's actions or deeds. The third meaning of *karam*, which happens to be derived from Arabic sources, is conceptually synonymous with the terms *nadar* and *kirpa* (implying grace) and the Persian term *hukam* (order/command/will/call, etc.).

The Vedic (orthodox Hindu) term *karma* corresponds to something like a psychophysical law according to which every action – physical or mental – has its own consequence which must be faced either in this life or in lives to come. The term thus corresponds to doctrines and processes of reincarnation and transmigration. In order to reap the consequences of one's previous *karma*, an individual self (*jiva*) has to take another birth, but in the very process of acting out this consequence, the *jiva* creates further chains of actions that incur further debt thereby setting in motion an endless cycle of birth-action-death-rebirth, etc. This cycle works on the principle of obligatory debt referred to variously as the karmic cycle or the wheel of alternating birth of death (*janam maran ka chakar*). The production of fresh *karma* keeps the wheel in endless motion until the chain is broken through the eradication of *karma* (= > debt) and the *jiva* eventually attains liberation (*mukti*) from the karmic cycle.

Now, while the Sikh understanding of this process clearly acknowledges the traditional Indian articulation as a backdrop, there are some very important differences. Indeed the difference between the traditional Indic (or Brahmanic) concept of *karma* and the Sikh-Sant articulation of it, encapsulated within the linked terms *karam/nadar/hukam*, boils down to very different concepts of time. Accordingly the interlinked notions of *karam*, *nadar*, and *hukam* often appear in the same hymn, underscoring the essentially paradoxical unity between them:

The deeds you do won't help you in the end,  
For you reap whatever you've sown.  
There is no other to protect you then,  
Besides the saving grace shown by the Lord. [10]

In the writings of the Sikh Gurus, the Vedic notion of *karma* is replaced by the term *hukam*, the

imperative that is inherent within the nature of existence. Instead of karma the Gurus speak of *karam*, deeds or actions that are aligned either with or against the working of hukam. Existence itself is depicted by the Gurus as an unfolding of the One, a writing (*lekh*) that is held in place by a fabric of space, time, and cause (the so-called three qualities or *tin gun*). The metaphor of writing signifies the nature of the One as a nonstatic or continually flowing action. Thus any action committed by an individual ego, which by definition is already separated from the One, works against the flow of nature, effectively creating eddies that attempt to freeze the flux of existence. By working against the flow of *hukam*, every egotistic action leaves traces of its signature (*kar*; *karni*) within the temporal fabric. Instead of simply arising and passing out of existence as would be required by *hukam*, these karmic traces accumulate and prolong the separation between ego and the One.

As the context in which actions are performed, the operation of hukam can be likened to the law of conservation of energy, with the proviso that it is not limited physical nature but includes the nonphysical or psychic aspect of sentient beings such as thoughts, speech, desires, and feelings. Thus “good” and “bad” rebirths are not rewards or punishments but are consequences of specific actions. An action is like a seed which must bear fruit either in this life or the next:

We reap as we have sown, we eat as we have earned,  
No check is made of those who are marked as approved.  
We are all classified according to our deeds,  
The breath without remembrance is drawn to no avail. [10]

What determines the nature of a karmic seed, however, is the nature of a particular action. Moreover, each and every action, even when this action is intentional as in thought, speech, desire, or feeling, is imprinted into the temporal fabric of the self through the work of memory. These imprints are confirmed tendencies which can be regarded as being somewhat like psychic genes. Actions repeated over time turn into tendencies or habits carried by an individual through this life into the next, unless a way is found to secure release from the imprinting process. Indeed there

are certain meritorious actions, such as self-surrender, ego loss, dying to the self, which, if performed, stop the imprinting process:

We repeat that same act  
Prescribed from the beginning.  
But who can estimate the act  
Of surrender to the Guru? [10]

As the most meritorious of all actions, self-surrender requires the intervention of a satguru either in person or in Word. The person who surrenders his or her mind to the guru is called a gurmukh – lit. one whose being is turned toward the guru and who no longer performs actions from the standpoint of ego:

All wear the cloak of lust and wrath  
On entering the world.  
Some see the light while others die  
As the command dictates.  
There is no end to birth and death,  
Possessed by other love.  
Bound in chains they transmigrate  
There is nothing they can do.  
The guru comes to those on whom God’s mercy is bestowed.  
They turn away to die in life  
With spontaneity. [10]

In contrast to the gurmukh stand the self-centered (manmukh) who continue to act from the standpoint of ego. The actions of a gurmukh arise spontaneously.

The intertwined nature of *karam* and *nadar*, of the gurmukh and manmukh, is perhaps best illustrated by references in the Gurus’ hymns to transmigration and the cycle of births and deaths. Insofar as both the gurmukh and the self-willed must perform actions in time, the cycle of births and deaths provides a mythical perspective on time and life which gives rise to sympathy and respect for all living beings. That all existing things are subject to birth, death, and passage between different forms means that everything that is and that happens is absolutely interconnected. This interconnectedness of all existence is the only proper starting point for ethical thinking.

### **Biraha: The State of Fusion-Separation**

An important consequence of the concept of mind as Nanak elaborates it is that it at once refines and negates the monotheistic concept of self/God as



a relationship between inside and outside. In Nanak's teaching this relationship is played out "in the mind" as it were, as the movement of love between lover (unconscious mind as nonego) and beloved (mind-as-ego). Monotheism in the strict sense becomes almost redundant in the movement and crossings of love. Or when this love relationship is consummated (fusion), its outward manifestation is as an existence in the world that is radically interconnected to all others. This death of ego-mind, or its capitulation to the embrace of the lover (unconscious mind), is constituted as a realization that our singularity is punctuated by the presence of other existing beings, not simply humans. A fact which opens up the possibility of ethics and politics based on a state of mind that keeps its two halves fused together in a state of balance. Let us try and unpack these ideas a little more carefully.

Part of the problem of monotheism, as we have already noted, is that it remains within a standpoint from which reality is perceived dualistically in terms of either/or oppositions: One/Many, existence/nonexistence, form/formlessness, good/evil, etc. Such a standpoint, however, replaces the immediate experience of the One with the dualistic representation of that experience. For Nanak the One cannot be attained by simply annihilating such oppositions or by elevating one term over another. Rather the unity proper to the Absolute must remain a paradox, that is, as the minimal coincidence of self with other. Nanak's term for this coincidence of self and other is *birha*. Resisting all description except through paradox, *birha* signifies a link between self and other that exists only in erasing itself. *Birha* is a point at which self and other touch and fuse but are ever in danger of separating [10]. In *birha* separation is the same as union and vice versa. To speak of this state the Gurus invoke the intensely emotional imagery of the virgin bride who anticipates the embrace of her husband on her wedding night or the wife's longing for her husband's return from a far-off land. Bride, virgin, wife are simply metaphors for a self which is individuated and which pines for the union with the other. The emotion invoked here is that of intensely painful longing combined with the ecstasy of fusion. The pain signifies the minimal link to the self which cannot be broken for otherwise fusion

would mean annihilation of self and world. Hence, self and therefore separation always remain but within ecstasy. Alternatively, the ecstasy of fusion is always there but tinged with the pain of separation. This state of fusion-separation where knowledge becomes nonknowledge is not a metaphysical ideal but a lived reality, a state of liberation, in which the liberated person *instinctively* avoids relating to everything else in terms of subject-object duality. Such a realized person no longer represents the Absolute since the conscious distinction between self and other, I and not-I, lover and beloved, *nirgun* (nonexistence or a being that cannot be predicated) and *sargun* (existence or a being that can be predicated) has disappeared leaving an ecstatic and purely spontaneous form of existence (*sahaj*: literally equipoise).

In the writings of the Sikh Gurus, a person who maintains this state of *birha* and its attendant balance of separation-fusion, self-other, action-inaction, attachment-detachment in the course of daily life is known as *gurmukh* (literally one whose speech is centered around the Guru-Word, the Unconscious Word, the *satguru*). The *gurmukh* lives in stark contradiction to the *manmukh* (one whose existence is self-centered). The distinction between *gurmukh* and *manmukh* is more than just an ethical one since "ethic" implies some minimal binding to some norm or duty. Rather the distinction implies a freedom from the bindings of the self, which gives rise not to an annihilation of self but to a spontaneity of speech-thought-action. Whether this transition is viewed epistemologically as a shift from duality to Oneness or existentially from *manmukh* to *gurmukh*, the transition itself revolves around the efficacy of the Name (*nām*) which is both the object of love and the means of loving attachment to one's beloved. The term *nām* names the impossible point of contact between self-other, separation-fusion. Attunement to *nām* constitutes a wordless communication between self and other which corresponds to the primordial love through which all existent things relate to each other before individuation takes over.

In Guru Nanak's hymns *nām* is not a particular word or mantra. It is inscribed within yet manifests as speech in which traces of ego are constantly erased as they arise. As the constituting link

between interiority and worldly action, *nām* arises involuntarily in the *gurmukh*'s speech through the practice of constantly holding in mind the remembrance of death (*nām simaran*). But *nām* cannot be obtained through self-effort alone. Its attainment depends on the grace or favorable glance (*kirpā*, *nadar*) of a spiritual preceptor or a guru.

### Guru as Word: *śabda*, *nam*, *satguru*

As one of the central terms in the Sikh lexicon, the term “guru” takes on theologicopolitical connotations that go well beyond its meaning and application in the broader South Asian context, where it is limited to a teacher of worldly knowledge or a conveyor of spiritual insights. In Sikh tradition the term “guru” automatically incorporates this earlier meaning, referring thereby to the personality of Guru Nanak and his nine successor Gurus. Metaphorically it refers to the same principle of spirituality manifested in all ten Gurus; practically it serves to indicate the authority vested in the name “Nanak.” Thus the hymns of the different Gurus in the *Adi Granth* are cited according to their respective composers as sequential locations (*mohala*) for the manifestation of the name “Nanak.” Just before the death of the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, spiritual authority was vested in the *Adi Granth* (henceforth *Guru Granth Sahib*), leading to the doctrine of scripture or Word as Guru (*śabda-guru*).

The logic of this doctrine notwithstanding, the question arises as to who was Nanak's guru? Who or what was his source of ultimate authority? It may be helpful here to look at several ways in which Nanak himself answers this question:

The Word is my guru, my mind attuned to it is its disciple.

I stay detached through the Unspoken Word [10]

I narrate the Word of my Beloved as it comes to me [10]

Elsewhere Nanak says, “I myself do not know how to speak, For as I am commanded, so I speak.” What is interesting here is that despite speaking much, Nanak says categorically that *he* cannot speak, he himself is silent; rather, he claims, it is the Word that speaks, not Nanak. As we have noted in the discussions above, in order to be vested with

authority, Nanak must silence the speech of his ego (the faculty that says “I am”) by renouncing his claim to authority over what is spoken. Nanak's renunciation of authority is indicative of the fact that his own preceptor was not a human guru but an impersonal principle: the Word (*śabda*) which Nanak also calls *satguru* (lit. the true authority), a term that implies a personal relation to the Word. Personal or impersonal, only the Word speaks truly about the nature of existence.

A variation on the terms *śabda* and *satguru* is the term *anhad śabda* or *anhad nād* (lit. the “unspoken Word” or “unstruck Sound”) inherited by the Sikh Gurus from their predecessors such as Kabir who in turn borrows the term from the Siddhās and Nāths, the expert practitioners of Haṭha Yoga. According to Nāth usage *anhad śabda* refers to the “Eternal Sound” that is heard at the climax of the Haṭha Yoga process. In the context of the Sants and the Sikh Gurus the term refers to words or language that is not tainted by traces of ego and therefore not like ordinary communication between egos in which words are merely labels for things.

As *anhad śabda* the Word itself speaks or resounds without being spoken. This sounds like a tautology but actually indicates a mode of communication in which ego no longer controls the production of words, nor indeed the process of making words into things. Removed from the grasp of ego, words are no longer given value according to their degree of correspondence to things but instead arise from an internalized mode of speech that occurs between conscious (ego) and unconscious (nonego) mind. The unspoken Word arises from a mode of communication in which the mind speaks with itself, giving the impression of a departure from the standards of everyday social reality in which speech is meaningful if it makes sense to everybody. The point of this seemingly impossible communication is to rejoin the two aspects of the dualistic mind separated by ego sense. Devoid of ego traces the Word that is so minted in the mind appears as an expression of wonder (*vismāḍ*) at the nature of existence, that things exist at all rather than nothing. Just as all creation simply happens without asking why, so the unspoken Word arises without connection to intention, desire, or will.

Thus Guru Nanak's authority, what makes him Guru or *gurmukh*, is derived from the *satguru* = *śabda*. But *satguru* as *śabda-guru* manifests only when the ego erases its own traces but without annihilating itself. This self-erasure is another name for the love between self and other that enables them to be One even in separation. Thus Nanak's authority is derived of his own experience of the One.

This experience is authoritative inasmuch as it entails a radical reorientation of consciousness which constitutes what is normally understood as liberation. Thus the liberative reorientation of consciousness that the Sikh Gurus are looking for must happen primarily at the level of language or Word (*śabda*), such that one's ordinary relationship to language, which is based on self-naming where the "I" is attached to a primary identification to its own image and name, is transformed by its attunement to the Word as *nām* (the Name). *Nām* is the link by means of which all existing things acknowledge their nonexistent source, as well as the means by which each self acknowledges its link to its voided other.

### **Nam: Beyond the Personal and the Impersonal**

As the Sikh Gurus articulate it, insofar as *nām* cannot simply be reduced to God's Name or to the names of individual gods, it illustrates the paradox of the One and the Many. Throughout the *Adi Granth*, *nām* serves to replace what is named in other (especially religious and philosophical) traditions as "God" whose name is no more than a tool for calling this entity to mind at will. In contradistinction, *nām* makes superfluous the need for such an entity and thereby constitutes the single most important term for deriving a post-theistic *gurmata*. For the Gurus, any "God" or "god" that is outside of the ego is to remain subject to the operation of *māyā*, the veil of illusion generated by the ego. Although "God" is referred to as the highest or ultimate, etc., these superlatives still only refer to a highest or ultimate entity which remains within a scale determined by man. Thus, whereas "God" is liable to be turned into an idol and therefore never experienced as such, *nām* signifies that divinity can

only be experienced through the meeting of eternity and time, absolute and finite. *Nām* is therefore not so much an indicator of transcendental experience as it is of the possibility of all possible experience. The term *nām* is as much theological as it is political. To see how this might be the case, it is helpful to relate our discussion of *nām* to two other terms used by Guru Nanak to refer to his experience of the One: the terms *nirgun* and *sargun*.

**Nirgun**: the experience of the divine as ineffable, without qualities, beyond naming, signifies the divinity's detachment or nonexistence; hence either "God" has no Name or God's Name is the signifier of emptiness. **Sargun**: "God" has infinite names, corresponding to infinite attributes, and insofar signifies absolute fullness, or a full involvement of the divinity in all things. Yet for Nanak these two opposing terms are also the same: *nirgun āp sargun bī ohī* (being absent the same One is also fully present, or, the one detached is the same as the one involved) [10]. So "God" is beyond yet "God" actualizes himself through the relation of equivalence, and therefore substitutability, between all names and things. As there is equivalence between all things, so God's ineffability/absence and his fullness/presence are different aspects of the same formless one: *sargun nirgun niraṁkār* [10].

*Nam* therefore names this equivalential connection (*sargun-nirgun*) as an ineffable fullness, which is to say that *nām* is a signifier of emptiness, an empty signifier. So what we regard as an entity called "God" is better termed *nām*, such that *nām* implies an entity that is involved in the world but is at the same time absent. Only *nām* can signify this impossible relation between absence/presence, nonexistence/existence, empty/full, etc. And *nām* can do this not because it has any meta-physical characteristics but precisely because it is part of an already existing discursive network of signifiers, a symbolic order that we call language. *Nām*, in other words, is part of the fabric of ordinary and everyday experience. *Nām* therefore helps us make sense of the divine paradox (*nirgun-sargun*) by putting the impossible, the beyond, the absent, to play in the context of finitude [10]. I can only experience the Absolute as utterly empty (*nirgun*) if I can project it into the contingent, everyday experience of particulars

(*sargun*) and therefore be involved in the world. Consequently *nām*, as experience, is to experience the detachment (*nirgun*) while living, speaking, and being involved in ordinary worldly experience (*sargun*). If something is experienced by the mystic, then this experience, if it is not to remain abstract or detached, must actualize itself through attachment to a particular, to that which is finite and, therefore, to contingent events. If *nām* names the mystical experience that desires ultimate fullness, then *nām* must accompany all positive experience. This is also the condition of all authority, of all sovereignty, and consequently of the political. Authority or sovereignty is such only if it is radically empty or represented through the empty signifier that is *nām*.

This is why the Gurus prefer *nām*, a term which names the intricate link or experience between self and other. In contradistinction to the “I” generated by ego’s cravings which operates an economy of narcissism precisely to gain a return to oneself, hence self-ownership as the beginning of ownership of the other, Name is the only capital that cannot be reduced to the status of a thing and circulated in an economy of exchange. Nanak’s instruction in this regard is very pragmatic: one cannot simply escape the economic nature of one’s existence in the world driven by the self’s desire to make everything its own property. But it is possible to change the very nature of this economy by transforming narcissistic self-love into a love of the Name.

Moreover the Gurus suggest a practice for transforming the ego-based economy of ordinary life in which we accumulate knowledge, exchange entities, transact commerce, reasonable rules, plans and projects, rites, and rituals. This practice is *nām simaran*: the constant holding in remembrance of the Name, which goes beyond mechanical repetition to become a spontaneous form of love between self and other. The paradoxical dialectic here between appropriation of *nām* and disappropriation of ego becomes more evident from the etymology of the word *simaran*. Derived from the Indo-European root *smṛ-* (to remember, hold in mind) the term has traditionally been understood to resonate with the Sanskrit terms *mr-* and *maranā*, to die or pass away, suggesting that *simaran* is a form of remembrance which automatically lets go or

renounces. Stated differently, *simaran* is first of all remembrance of one’s own mortality, of the ego’s death, remembering which one awakens to the Name. *Nām simaran* is therefore the condition of experience of finitude. Alternatively, the experience of finitude is the condition for the experience of *nām*. Because *nām simaran* is not a metaphysical concept but a concrete sacrificial practice for transforming memory, as that function of mind which weaves time into the structures that manipulate our existence and thinking, it can also be viewed as a way of transforming worldly time and existence. It provides a means for the individual to participate and make changes in the world. *Nām simaran* is as inherently political as it is spiritual. As a result such conceptual dualities as those between religion and politics, mysticism and violence become superfluous. This is evident in the lives of the Sikh Gurus for whom there was no contradiction between mystical experience and the life of a soldier, householder, or political leader.\*

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
- ▶ [Death \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Dreams \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Guru](#)
- ▶ [Japji](#)
- ▶ [Knowledge \(Gian\), Sikhism](#)
- ▶ [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Mind \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Nitnem](#)
- ▶ [Seva](#)
- ▶ [Sikhi](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)
- ▶ [Word](#)

---

\*Earlier versions of this article have appeared in Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. 2013. London: Bloomsbury and in *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, editors Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech, Oxford University Press. 2014

## References

1. Kaur G (1991) Reason and revelation in the Sikh tradition
2. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the spectre of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
3. McLeod WH (1969) Teachings of Guru Nanak. In: Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
4. McLeod WH (1990) A Sikh theology for modern times. In: McLeod WH, Oxtoby W, Israel M, Grewal JS, O'Connell JT (eds) Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century. Manohar Publications, New Delhi
5. Mehboob HS (1988) Sahije Rachio Khalsa. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
6. Randhawa MS (2009) Pūrana Singhā : jīwanī te kawitā. Sahita Academy, New Delhi
7. Singh S (1944) The philosophy of Sikhism. Lahore
8. Singh K (1969) Janamsakhi Parampara. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh N (1990) Philosophy of Sikhism: reality and its manifestations. Atlantic Publishers, Delhi
10. Singh M (1996) Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar
11. Singh S (1996) About compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Lok Sahit Prakashan, Amritsar
12. Singh P (2000) The Guru Granth Sahib: canon, meaning, and authority. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
13. Singh V (2004) Puratan Janam Sakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi

## Pilgrimage (Sikhism)

Navtej K. Purewal  
Sociology, School of Social Sciences,  
University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

## Synonyms

[Darshan](#); [Yatra](#)

## Definition

While every gurdwara is sacred due to its denoted function as an instillation of the Sikh holy book *The Guru Granth Sahib*, historical gurdwaras occupy a particularly sacred often mystical place to Sikhs, thus making them symbolic sites of

pilgrimage. This entry will address both the revered and critical position that pilgrimage has within Sikh spiritual practice.

## Sikh Pilgrimage in Scripture and Practice

### Pilgrimage in Sikh Spiritual Life

Historical gurdwaras have come to constitute a geography of Sikh pilgrimage sites scattered across South Asia, mainly in contemporary India and Pakistan, which not only denote places of worship but also exist as commemorations of events of miracles, enlightenment, sacrifice, and martyrdom significant to Sikh history and identity. While every gurdwara is sacred due to its denoted function as an instillation of the Sikh holy book *The Guru Granth Sahib*, historical gurdwaras occupy a particularly sacred, often mystical, place to Sikhs in terms of being sites of pilgrimage where respects to specific sites associated with events documented in Sikh history and mystical lore can be offered. However, it is important to note that the concept of pilgrimage is also critically addressed within the scriptures, beginning with Guru Nanak (1469–1539) who pointed directly to the futility of pilgrimage as an act resulting in spiritual enlightenment. Instead, Guru Nanak highlighted the paramount importance of inner-spirituality over ritualistic practices in arguing that pilgrimage not only to Mecca but also to the multitude of Hindu and other local sites should not be seen as shortcuts to higher spiritual attainment.

Pilgrimages, austere discipline, compassion and charity

These, by themselves, bring only an iota of merit.

Listening and believing with love and humility  
in your mind,

Cleanse yourself with the Name at the sacred  
shrine deep within.

Tirath tap daiaa dat daan

Je ko paavai til ka maan.

Sunhia maniaa man keetaa bhaao

Antargat tirath mal naao.

(Adi Granth: 4, Guru Nanak)

Dominant religious thinking in medieval North India was shaped by the projection of an Islam oriented towards Arabia and Mecca on the one



hand and a Brahminical Hinduism informed by social hierarchies and ritualistic practices on the other [3]. Guru Nanak and his successors challenged such currents by criticizing piety through ritual and pilgrimage and encouraging an inwardly reflective devotional spiritual path.

Pilgrimage, while having certain scriptural limits which discourage ritualized practices, also evokes devotion towards the Word (*sabad*) and the Name (*nam*) [2]. The concept of pilgrimage is thus played upon in the compiled writings of Guru Nanak and his predecessors Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Namdev, and Bhagat Kabir, as well as his successors Guru Ram Das (1534–1581) and Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606), in addition to others, who both see its place as a practice and as a metaphor for taking steps towards one's own spiritual enlightenment through dedicated inner-devotion.

Merits of pilgrimages, fasts and hundreds and thousands of techniques of austerity and self-discipline are found in the dust at the feet of the Holy.

From whom are you trying to hide your actions? God sees all. He is omnipresent. My God pervades all places and interspaces.

*Tirath vart lakh sanjamaa paaiai sadhu dhoor  
Look kamaavai kis te jaa vekhai sadaa hadoor.  
Thaan thanantar rav rahiaa prabh meraa bharpoor  
(Adi Granth: 48 Guru Arjan Dev)*

I have tried to visit all of the sacred shrines of pilgrimage, fasting, ceremonial feasts and giving to charities. They do not measure up to the Name of the Lord, Har Har. The Lord's Name is unweighable, utterly heavy in weight; through the Guru's teachings, a sincere yearning to chant the Name has welled up in me.

*Sabh tirath vart jag punn tolaahaa  
Har har nam na pueh pujaahaa  
Har har atul tol at bhaaree gurmat jap omaahaa ram.  
(Adi Granth: 699, Guru Ram Das)*

While having a delimited role within Sikh spiritual life, the *yatra* or journey of pilgrimage made to a historical gurdwara continues to have a symbolic spiritual meaning for Sikhs. As well as providing a collective sense of *sangat* (community of worshippers) and *panth* (path), pilgrimage to gurdwaras associated with events and sites marking the lives of the Gurus represents a journey for the pilgrim or *yatri* which allows him or her to tread

along the path of the Guru. Pilgrimage also has a personal, individual dimension of inner reflection and meditation which fits within the inner reflective focus earlier mentioned. Thus, for a Sikh *yatri* to pay “darshan” (viewing or visit) to a historical pilgrimage site is a sacrosanct, momentous act in one's spiritual life as a Sikh.

## Sikh Pilgrimage Sites in Context

Events associated with the lifetimes of all ten Gurus are marked by a significant number of historical gurdwaras and pilgrimage sites for Sikhs, which exist in India, Pakistan, and other places where the Gurus went during their lifetimes. However, the history of Sikh presence and identity pre-exists the colonial borders of annexed Punjab in 1849 and the contemporary geopolitical demarcations of state and boundaries shaped by the partition of 1947 and the linguistic reorganization of states in 1966. Therefore, many significant pilgrimage sites exist outside of Indian Punjab which continue to attract pilgrims from all over the world.

The travels of the Gurus spanned vast geographies across South Asia and beyond which is where the inception of pilgrimage partially stems from. Historical gurdwaras today can be found in many different countries, some of which have survived and others, in the past few decades in places where religious minorities have been under threat such as Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, which have not. For the purposes of this chapter, gurdwaras significant for Sikh pilgrimage can be grouped as follows:

- (a) Gurdwaras in Pakistan, many of which mark the birth, childhood, and death place of Guru Nanak as well as the martyrdom of the Fifth Guru Arjan Dev and the birthplace of Guru Ram Das
- (b) Gurdwaras of the five Takhts, or seats of temporal authority, starting with the establishment of the Akal Takht in 1606 by the Sixth Guru Hargobind (1595–1644) who introduced the concept of miri-piri (the duty of every Sikh to balance spiritual duties with temporal responsibilities)

- (c) Other gurdwaras scattered around South Asia which have a mystical significance for pilgrims who visit

### Gurdwaras in Pakistan: Pilgrimage Across Estrangement

Guru Nanak's udasi's (travels) sketched out the most vast geography of early Sikh history in which his four journeys took him to the furthest corners of South Asia to the Himalayas, Ceylon, and Bengal, as well as Arabia, Persia, and Central Asia. There are shrines scattered across these routes at places where he resided, discoursed with other learned and spiritual figures, and spread his message to local people along his journey [4]. These are reflected upon in the *Janamsakhis*, the main sources that we have of Guru Nanak's life. Gurdwaras which fall within contemporary Pakistan hold a particularly special place for Sikh pilgrims as the sites associated with Guru Nanak's birthplace and final years have been estranged from Sikhs since the erection of the border in 1947 (Figs. 1 and 2).

### The Five Takhts

Pan\_jaan\_takhtaan sarbat gur\_duaariaan\_daa dhiaan  
dhar ke bolo ji, Waheguru!

Turn your thoughts to the Five *Takhts* and all the  
Gurdwaras and utter 'O Khalsa, Waheguru'!  
(*Ardas*, prayer of appeal to the Almighty)

The Five *Takhts* (seats of authority) comprise of gurdwaras with particular relation to the history of the Sikh religion's formal establishment. As sites of pilgrimage, many Sikhs uphold these sites as significant in highlighting the geographical expanse of the Sikh movement during the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries in establishing itself as a popular, mass movement to state imposition of religion by the Mughal Empire of the time. These gurdwaras are associated with the era spanning the lifetimes of the Sixth Guru (Guru Hargobind 1595–1644) and the Tenth Guru (Guru Gobind Singh 1666–1708).

Akal Takht (seat of the timeless or immortal one)  
Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar – erected in 1606  
as a symbol of military and spiritual resistance



**Pilgrimage (Sikhism), Fig. 1** Nankana Sahib, which had previously been a small shrine, was developed into a gurdwara complex centuries after Guru Nanak's lifetime by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the nineteenth century (Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak. Contemporary Pakistan)

to tyranny and oppression of the Mughal campaign during that time

Takht Sri Patna Sahib in Patna, Bihar – in remembrance of the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh  
Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib – site of the initiation by Guru Gobind Singh of the Khalsa in 1699

Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo, Bhatinda – the site where Guru Gobind Singh is said to prepared and edited the authentic version in 1706 of the *Adi Granth* in as it is known today

Takht Sri Hazoor Sahib, Nanded, Maharashtra – the place of Guru Gobind Singh's martyrdom in 1708

The Five *Takhts* mark a remembrance of martyrdom, proclamation, and sacrifices made in order for Sikhs to have the official, distinctive identity which they have today. By visiting these



**Pilgrimage (Sikhism), Fig. 2** Panja Sahib Gurdwara has a particularly mystical sense for those who visit. It lies in the town of Hasan Abdal, located at the point where the Grand Trunk Road and the Karakoram Highway meet near the Northwest Frontier Province 40 km northwest of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. It is the spot where Guru Nanak is said to have stopped a boulder with his hand in ensuring the local people had a continual source of water flowing down to their village in order to sustain themselves. The stone with the imprint of Guru Nanak's hand is within the gurdwara complex (Imprint of Guru Nanak's hand on a boulder at Panja Sahib Gurdwara, Hasan Abdal, Pakistan)

sites, Sikh pilgrims to these gurdwaras commemorate the symbolism that the events associated with each site contribute to the Sikh movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and of Khalsa identity.

### Gurdwaras of Mystical Significance

While the act of embarking on a pilgrimage has differing meanings to different worshippers [1], each place of worship has its own essence and imagery associated with the story of the shrine's place within Sikh history [5]. Indeed, the Golden Temple (also known as Harmandir or Darbar Sahib) has a paramount position within popular discourse of pilgrimage, not only for Sikhs but

also for non-Sikh visitors who come from all over India and internationally (Fig. 3).

To listen to live audio transmission of *shabad kirtan* (sacred hymns) from the Golden Temple: <http://www.sgpc.net/liveaudio.asp>

Thousands of pilgrims visit the Golden Temple every day as tourists and as spiritual visitors, paying respects to the most symbolic and iconic sites associated with Sikhism. Initially built by the Third Sikh Guru Ram Das as a small shrine in 1574 surrounded by a small lake in the forest, the Golden Temple was completed in 1588 by the Fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev and has ever since been viewed as the spiritual center for Sikhs. Destroyed three times during the eighteenth century by Afghan invaders Ahmed Shah Abdali and Nadir Shah and rebuilt by Sikhs as a symbol of Sikhism's resilience and resistance, the Golden Temple's sanctity is one which pilgrims revere as one showing the depth of the Sikhism's contributions to the region's history of resistance to religious oppression. Diwali is perhaps the most popular time of pilgrimage to the Golden Temple as it is associated with the day that the Sixth Guru Hargobind was released from and walked out of Gwalior jail with 52 rajas. This story is recreated in the lighting of diyas/divas during the evening of Diwali, known as *bandi chor diwas* (day of release of the imprisoned). The healing properties of the *sarovar* (sacred pool of water) surrounding the Harmandir are also an attraction for pilgrims, many of whom bathe in the *amrit sarovar* (pool of nectar) as part of their pilgrimage ritual (Fig. 4).

The sanctity of the story of the sarovar's healing properties stems from the story of a woman who visited the Darbar Sahib to meet the Third Guru Ram Das in order to get blessings for her husband suffering from leprosy. While meeting Guru Ram Das, the woman is said to have witnessed a dirty crow emerging from the sarovar as a clean, beautiful bird. Soon after, her husband bathed in the sarovar as a cured man. The healing qualities of the sarovar and the soothing sounds of prayers and *shabad kirtan* (sacred hymns) resounding from the sanctum of the Golden Temple make this the most popular of all pilgrimage sites.

Hemkunt Sahib is another significant pilgrimage site which is known for its tranquillity

**Pilgrimage (Sikhism),**

**Fig. 3** A sewadar (volunteer steward) overseeing the flow of worshippers on the parkrama (outerwalkway) at Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. Harmandir Sahib has become one of the most iconic of sites in the region for pilgrimage and tourism for Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike

**Pilgrimage (Sikhism),**

**Fig. 4** Worshippers bathing in the amrit sarovar (pool of holy nectar) which surrounds the Golden Temple



associated with Guru Gobind Singh's time of meditation, inner reflection, and austerity. Located in the foothills of the Uttarakhand Himalayas bordering Nepal and Tibet, this site emerged as a site of pilgrimage in the twentieth century. There was much speculation of where precisely Guru Gobind Singh had meditated in this mountainous area. Renowned twentieth-century Sikh scholar Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) is said to have developed the site through insistence that this was indeed the spot referred to in Guru Gobind Singh's autobiography *Bachitra Natak*. The journey to Hemkunt

Sahib is physically challenging and can only be made during 4 months of the year – June to October – due to extreme snow and ice conditions. After reaching the base of the route, pilgrims must climb along a steep stone path of over 1,000 steps, be carried by porters, or ride mules to the Gurdwara and the amrit sarovar which takes approximately 2 days. The arduous nature of the journey is thought to be part of the experience of the pilgrimage, and most people who make the journey would do so knowing the physical difficulty involved. Many devout pilgrims bathe in the freezing water



of the amrit sarovar (pool of nectar) in the spirit of austerity and inner reflection. In this sense, pilgrims are partaking or reenacting Guru Gobind Singh's journey to this site by bravely making the journey themselves to this remote, mountainous site.

Pilgrimage enables worshippers to both feel a part of Sikh history by walking in the steps of the Gurus and to express a "this-worldly" devotion by connecting sacred worship with practical acts and actions within their own lives. The historical gurdwaras mentioned here are popular pilgrimage sites due to their associations with the Gurus' lives in terms of miracles, places of birth and death, significant events, and points of battle or martyrdom. In a sense, gurdwaras frequented by pilgrims are records of history for worshippers who visit them. However, while pilgrimage has a prominent place within Sikh religious practice, it also has a clearly circumscribed position as an act of individual choice which will not in itself result in salvation.

## Cross-References

- [Darshan](#)
- [Festivals](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Coleman S, Elsner J (1995) Pilgrimage: past and present: sacred travel and sacred space in the world religions. British Museum Press, London
2. Jutla RS (2006) Pilgrimage in Sikh tradition. In: Timothy DJ, Olsen DH (eds) Tourism, religion and spiritual journeys. Routledge, New York
3. Mandair, A, Shackle C (ed and trans) (2005) Teachings of the sikh gurus: selections from the sikh scriptures. Routledge, New York
4. Qaiser I (1998) Historical Sikh shrines in Pakistan. Punjab History Board, Lahore
5. Singh G (1995) Historical Sikh shrines. Singh Brothers, Amritsar

## Poetry

- [Anand Sahib](#)

## Poetry of the Sikh Gurus

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

Department of Religious Studies, Colby College, Waterville, ME, USA

## Synonyms

[Bani](#); [Dasam Granth](#); [Guru Granth Sahib](#); [Hymns of the Sikh Guru](#)

## Definition

Sikh sacred verse

## Main Text

### Poetry of the Sikh Gurus

The Sikh religion is lodged in Guru Nanak's poetic matrix, which continues to bring about new potentialities and possibilities. In the collective memory of the Sikhs, their founder Guru Nanak born in 1469 within a religiously plural landscape of pre-partition Punjab had the revelation of Being Itself. His response to the singular infinite Reality was a poetic outburst. His successor Gurus used the pseudonym "Nanak" and reiterated his vision each in his own voice. Unlike Plato who found poetry too captivating and therefore banished the poets from his Republic, the Sikh Gurus utilized the poetic medium to awaken their followers with an appreciation for the infinite One. The poetry of the Sikh Gurus can be summed up as a reflexive phenomenon – simultaneously a celebration, articulation, understanding, interpretation, and application of Guru Nanak's divine experience. More than 23 million men and women worldwide rely on its existential power. It is the center of Sikh private and public life: it is the core of their religious and moral values; it is the sovereign presiding at all their ceremonies and celebrations.



### Textual Sources

**The Guru Granth Sahib (GGS)**, also known as the *Adi Granth* or the *First Book*), the scripture of the Sikhs, and the **Dasam Granth** (Book of the Tenth) are the textual sources for the Gurus' verse. The GGS was compiled by Guru Arjan in 1604. The Tenth Guru (1666–1708) added the hymns and couplets of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the canon (though the actual process is hard to trace, and even contemporary scholars cannot come up with a single definite conclusion). Therefore, works of six Gurus are present in the GGS:

Guru Nanak, 974 hymns

Guru Angad, 62 couplets

Guru Amar Das, 907 hymns

Guru Ram Das, 679 hymns

Guru Arjan, 2,218 hymns

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, 59 hymns and 56 couplets

Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas (1551–1636) provides an interesting clue about the textual origins when he describes Guru Nanak holding a small volume (*pothi*) under his arm [1]. This could well be the manuscript that the Sodhi family from the village of Guru Har Sahai has claimed to have inherited (unfortunately stolen from a train in 1970). Bhai Gurdas' visual testimony raises questions about the compositions contained in the volume: what materials did it include? Was it inscribed in the Guru's own hand? Tropes about writing frequently surface in Guru Nanak's verse. In his *Japu*, the very first composition in the GGS, he says,

This diversity of creatures, classes, and colors  
Has been written in a single stroke of the Pen.  
Who knows to write this infinite Writ?  
What an infinite Writ to write.

Guru Nanak passed his collection of verse to his successor, who adding his own passed it on to the next, and so the tradition continued. In 1604 Guru Arjan, the fifth in line, compiled an authorized Granth for the growing Sikh community. Along with his predecessors, he also included the compositions of Hindu and Muslim holy men from different social backgrounds, and to enhance its aesthetic effect, he put most of the

text into the Indic Raga musical measures. The Granth was inscribed in the Gurmukhi script, which evolved from the *lande/mahajani* business shorthand used by Guru Nanak during his apprenticeship in granaries and storehouses. Its language is Punjabi, which was spoken by the local people of different ethnicities in their region. The English scholar Charles Wilkins described the language of the Granth as "a mixture of *Persian*, *Arabic* and some *Sanscrit*, grafted upon the provincial dialect of Punjab, which is a kind of Hindoovee, or, as it is vulgarly called by us, *moors* [2]." The GGS is the first anthology of Punjabi poetry and forms a rich archive – as it even holds the works of the first recognized Punjabi poet Sheikh Farid (1175–1265) [3].

The **Dasam Granth** (DG) is the collection of the writings attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, compiled sometime after his death in 1708, by his devoted follower Bhai Mani Singh. It is 1,428 pages long, so it is almost the same size as the GGS (1,430 pages). Although the GGS is the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, some parts of the DG are also used in Sikh prayers. The authorship and authenticity of a large proportion of this work is questioned. With the exception of a few poems composed by Guru Gobind Singh in the Punjabi language, most of the DG is in Braj, but the entire work is printed in the Gurmukhi script.

Guru Gobind Singh was a superb poet, who introduced vigorous meters and rhythms to recharge his people and created novel images and paradoxes to expand their worldview. He was also a great patron of the arts and employed numerous poets from different religious backgrounds. A lot of the poetry written by Guru Gobind Singh himself and his court poets was lost during his evacuation from Anandpur in 1705. Bhai Mani Singh spent years collecting whatever materials he could salvage, and from those he produced the first recension of the Dasam Granth. The DG remains controversial amongst scholars and elicits a range of responses from devotees. Compositions like the *Japu*, *Akal Ustat*, *Bicitra Natak*, *Candi Caritra*, *Candi di Var*, *Sabd Hazare*, and *Gian Prabodh* are generally accepted as Guru Gobind Singh's poetry and are revered by the Sikhs [4].

### The Divine Matrix

Since the Gurus' poetry is traced to the divine One, it functions as both the medium and the source of revelation. The founder Guru identified himself as a *sairu/shair*, from the Arabic word for poetry *al-shi'r*, which is traced to consciousness and knowledge. The Asian understanding of poetry is very different from "making" or "crafting" that underlies the Greek *poesis*. In the Sikh instance, the Gurus are so consumed by their awareness and love for the Divine that their words flow out intuitively. Guru Nanak proclaims, "*jaisi mai ave khasam ki bani taisara kari gianu ve lalo* – as comes to me the Husband's word, that is what I say O' Lalo!" (GGS: 722); "*ta mai kahia kahan ja tujhai kahaia* – I only spoke when you made me speak" (GGS: 566); and "*nanak kahai kahavai soe* – Nanak speaks just as that One makes me speak" (GGS: 1331). For the second Guru, the texture of transcendent light is the oral: "*joti vic tun bole*h – in the light is your speech" (GGS: 138). The Gurus repeatedly admit that they have no control over their orality; they utter only what comes to them. The Third says, "*agam alakh karan purakh jo furmavahi so kahau* – the unfathomable, ineffable, primal cause, whatever you order so I utter!" (GGS: 1395). The Fourth: *satigur ki bani sati sati kar jan hau gursikhu hari karta api muhhu kadhai* – truth, truth is the word of the true Guru, know it as the truth, O Sikhs, for the Creator Itself slips out the truth from the lips" (GGS: 308). In the same vein, the Fifth who put together the sacred text says, "*bolia boli tera* – I speak as you make me speak" (GGS: 23); "*nanak bole bolia tera* – Nanak says what you make him say" (GGS: 743), and yet again, "*hao ap bol na janda mai kahia sabh hukmao jio* – I do not know how to speak; I only say as you command me to" (GGS: 763). The equivalence between the utterance and the Guru is consistently affirmed: "*bani guru guru hai bani vicu bani amrit sare* – the Guru is the Word, the Word is the Guru, within the Word lie all elixirs" (GGS: 982). The poetic communication and the divine revelation are identical.

Paradoxically, the spontaneous speech ends up being most artistic. The words come in a gusty speed and form into lovely artistic designs,

innovative similes, mesmerizing paradoxes, and brilliant metaphors. They create perfect alliteration and rhyme, lyrical assonance, and consonance. Their momentum produces geometric patterns, verbal arabesques, stairlike parallelisms, and dynamic somersaults, which can awaken the consciousness to the infinite reality permeating each and all [5]. The simple similes from the Punjabi landscape endow the familiar sights and sounds with enchantment, the paradoxes break the conventional linear mode of thinking, and the metaphors expand the human experience. The transcendent soil of the Gurus' poetry gives new meaning to materials in this universe. Not fragmented by man-made walls of religion, gender, race, or class, it pours out of the Divine matrix through their deepest selves. The Gurus' orality revitalizes the senses, psyche, imagination, and the spirit.

Coming from the singular source, this evocative communication is shared with the cosmos. The Gurus repeatedly affirm the genuine affinity of species and languages: "*khani bani teria* – species and languages are yours," says Nanak (GGS: 580). Infinite species and infinite languages originate from the singular matrix and in turn become the medium of all communication, of life itself. The diverse and plural cosmos depends upon communication and union, which are brought about by language. In his Japu, the Guru says, "by words we speak and by words we write, by words we communicate and unite" (Japu: 19). His third successor affirms, "*ape khani ape bani ape khand varbhand kare* – you yourself are the species, you yourself are the languages, you yourself create the continents and constellations" (GGS: 552). Likewise, the Fifth: "*teria khani teria bani* – yours are the species, yours are the languages" (GGS: 116). The Guru poets utilize the primal language common to the vegetal, human, and animal spheres. Guru Nanak admires the tiny sparrow, who joyfully calls for her Divine beloved: "*khudai khudai*" (GGS: 1286). The poetry of the male Gurus is a return to the preoedipal state of language where male and female are united. Their "semiotic" words (in the sense of the French philosopher Julia Kristeva) follow the poetic-maternal linguistic practice, quite different from the male construction

and codification of language that structures univocal terms of language. As it articulates the ineffable Divine, the poetry of the Sikh Gurus illuminates the sounds and cadences common to humans and nature. Like the primordial sound of the heartbeat, the spiritual compositions pulsate with life and vigor. The syllables of their language are life and life's continuity; the sounds are breath, blood, water, and food.

### Spontaneous Communitas

The Guru's divine experience transpiring without conceptual constructs ends up reproducing an ineffable togetherness amongst readers/hearers, something that the anthropologist Victor Turner categorized as "*spontaneous communitas* [6]." When Guru Nanak settled by the banks of the Ravi in Kartarpur, men and women from different religious and societal backgrounds gathered around to hear and recite his sonorous rhyme. As documented by Bhai Gurdas, the daily pattern of life in Kartarpur revolved around the Guru's poetry: "in the morning Japu was recited, and in the evening, Arati and Sohila [7]." Guru Nanak's hymns were the powerful ligament that bonded men and women together in this first Sikh community, and to date, they are part of the daily Sikh routine. The fellowship generated by his poetry is spontaneous – devoid of any deliberate cognitive or volitional construction. Starting in Kartarpur, men and women were attracted by his sublime utterances. Discarding hegemonies of caste, class, gender, or creed, discarding conventional religious practices and rituals, they came to hear and recite Guru Nanak's verse. Engaged in ordinary occupations of life, these first "Sikhs" affirmed a new sense of family. Mutuality and reciprocity, which marked their relationship, continues to be the driving force. Fixed identities and distinctions dissolve as men and women sit on the floor and together hear, recite, and sing the Guru's words. In doing so they join contemporary Sikhs with those sitting midst Guru Nanak in Kartarpur; they join a congregation in rural Punjab with those in the diaspora – be it Africa, UK, or the New World. Through the Gurus' poetry, "Sikh" subjectivity came into being, and through the Gurus' poetry, it is sustained.

### Epistemological Resource

The Gurus' poetry is a unique epistemological resource, which fires several intricate currents all at once. First of all, it **celebrates** the singular One Nanak experienced. There is a certainty about Being configured at the beginning of Guru Nanak's prelude to his Japu (*ikk oan kar*), and the Gurus continue to rejoice in its infinite magic and wonder. There is an utter lack of ifs or buts or proofs or arguments for Its existence. The One IS. Anybody and everybody can embrace that One, literally the numeral *Ikk* (1). Profound joy surges throughout their verse and in turn boosts the confidence and emotions of readers/listeners. Furthermore, Guru Nanak goes on to **articulate** the *Ikk Oan Kar* as *sat* (Truth or Reality). His verbal approach indicates his inclination to bring Being into language. By giving the name (*nam*) – *sat* – a participle of *as* (to be), he identifies Truth as "existing," "occurring," "happening," and "being present." And along with celebrating and naming that absolute One, the founder Guru puts in motion the threefold hermeneutic process (explored extensively by the literary critic Hans-Georg Gadamer): an **understanding, interpretation, and application** of that One.

Right after naming the One as Truth, the Guru tries to **understand** its nature. A host of personal and impersonal qualities without conjunctions or prepositions issue forth: "*karta purakh nirbhau nirvair akal murat ajuni saibhan gur prasad* – creator person, without fear, without enmity, timeless in form, unborn, self-existent, gift of the Guru." Known as the Mul Mantar (root creed), this prelude to his inaugural hymn "Japu" in the GGS recurs throughout Sikh scripture. The rest of the 38 stanzas of the Japu, and actually the entire Guru Granth, elucidate Guru Nanak's **interpretation** of the One, which is both metaphysical and theological.

Poetically the Gurus explain Its rootedness in temporality. The "creator" attribute of Being is almost simultaneous with its True Name (follows it immediately in the Mul Mantar). The Gurus' melodies celebrate the phenomenal world as the fullness and reality of Truth: "*sace te pavana paia pavane te jal hoe jal te tribhavan sajia ghat ghat jot samoe* – from Truth came air, from the air came

water, from the water were created the three worlds; in each and every heart permeates its light” (GGS: 19). The singular creator is ever present in this multiverse with its myriad species, countless languages, political systems, and theological categories. How could anything be false or illusionary when that one Truth pervades each and every particle: “the earth is not false; water is not false – *jhuth na dharti jhut na pani*” (GGS: 1240). Temporality is an integral characteristic of the infinite One, and the Gurus repeatedly marvel at the lunar and solar systems, the movements making up days and dates, and the cyclic rhythm of seasons during the 12 months. The two Barah Mah compositions in the GGS (by Guru Nanak and by Guru Arjan) intimately juxtapose the Gurus’ spiritual longing with the constantly shifting seasons as the Earth makes its annual revolution around the sun. In the opening line of the Japu, Guru Nanak asserts, “*ad sacu jugadi sacu hai bhi sacu nanak hosi bhi sacu* – Truth was in the beginning, Truth has been through the cycles, Truth is, and Truth says Nanak, will be ever more.” In his imagining, the One (*akal murat ajuni*) is not out of time or space but actively functioning in and through the various tenses. Humans and the Divine share a common horizon of lived time.

The Gurus’ poetry is a kaleidoscopic hermeneutics of the singular Reality. No religious worldview is excluded; Hindu, Buddhist, Tantric, and Islamic views that were current at that time come together in its wide-ranging spectrum. Binaries between Hindu Bhakti and Abrahamic/Islamic worldviews are transcended: “Some call it Rama, some call it Khuda; some worship it as Vishnu, some as Allah,” declared Guru Arjan (GGS: 885). The Fourth Guru, “*ape siv sankar mahesh* – It itself is Shiva, Shankara, and Mahesh” (GGS: 553). Even the Buddhist Nirvana is not omitted from their hermeneutics: “*eko rav rahia nirbani* – the One pervades Nirvana” (GGS: 904). These words by Guru Nanak are echoed by Guru Arjan, “*ap nirbani ape bhoga* – Itself Nirvana, It itself relishes pleasures” (GGS: 97), and almost repeated, “*ap nirbani ape bhogi* – Itself is Nirvana, Itself is the enjoyer” (GGS: 1150). In the Gurus’ ontological understanding, there is no

opposition between the One and the many, nor is there any dualism between unity and plurality: “*ikkasu te hoio ananta nanak ekasu mahi samae jio*—from the One issue myriads and into the One they are ultimately assimilated” (GGS: 131).

Their poetic interpretations rising above binaries and categories reach out to that singular Divine in a variety of personal relations as well – father, mother, brother, friend, and lover. The Guru claims, “*mat pita bandhap tun hai tun sarab nivas* – you are our mother, father, relative, and you permeate us all” (GGS: 818). In such emotionally charged verses, the Gurus embrace the One abiding in everybody in a range of family figures. The sense of plenitude strips off conventional stratifications and widens the spiritual experience. In an exquisite passage, Guru Nanak exposes the metaphysical Being as the bride in her wedding dress, the groom on the nuptial bed. . . the fisherman and the fish, the waters and the trap, the weight holding the net, as well as the lost ruby swallowed by the fish. In a speedy tempo, his similes and paradoxes expand the imagination. The artist offers readers myriad possibilities of recollecting the infinite One – without letting the mind halt on any one. The cosmos is not polluted or deemed too low for the Divine to sparkle through each and every bit. Humans are not the only ones endowed with spiritual treasures – the fish has swallowed the ruby too.

Importantly the Gurus’ epistemic Absolute has a subjective significance: it is applied to existential meaning. As Gadamer observed, the cognitive and the practical are not different dimensions: interpretation, understanding, and application constitute a singular hermeneutic process [8]. For the Sikh Gurus, the knowledge of Truth is no different from its lived praxis. After naming the One as Truth, Guru Nanak raises the questions, “How to become Truth? How to break the walls of falsity?” (GGS: 1). There is a quick shift from the metaphysical Divine to the individual; from the timeless Creator to life lived truthfully here and now; and from the Divine ideal to the everyday attitudes, behavior, and actions. Orthopraxy takes precedence over orthodoxy, for a truthful mode of existence is deemed higher than

the conception of Truth: "Higher than everything is Truth but higher still is True living" (GGS: 62).

The end of the *Mul Mantar* pronounces: *saibhan* (self-existent) *gur prasad* (gift of the Guru). The finale returns to the opening, the ever presence of the infinite One, and as it recapitulates the *suis generis* attributes, it thrusts the circle forward towards flesh and blood recipients. A nexus is established between the universal Being and those subjects who recognize it in their own particular historical, social, and personal reality. Guru Nanak's usage of the term "*prasad*" with its synonyms "clearness" and "gift" is meaningful: the self-existent is of course absolutely evident, but is banished from memory; its disclosure therefore is a "gift" from the Guru. The Guru/poetry/*bani* is the epistemological mechanism that brings the ever present Being into consciousness so that life may be lived authentically here and now.

The Gurus were very sensitive to the hegemonies of caste, class, creed, race, ethnicity, and gender that prevailed in medieval north India. Their sublime lyrics make readers cognizant of the prejudices and stereotypes they may hold. If the melodies underscore the singular divine creator, it is to impact attitudes and actions. In fact Guru Nanak responds poignantly to the invasions of Babur. He narrates the defenseless being killed, Hindu women committing *sati* and Muslim women being brutally unveiled, and princes being trampled into dust. As far as the recounting of dates, places, and facts, his is not exactly a "historical document." What Guru Nanak accomplishes with haunting beauty is a synthesis of the particular sociopolitical conditions of medieval Indian milieu with absolute transcendent values. The real reason for Babur's devastation: "*jaru vandi devai bhai* – it is wealth that divides brothers" (GGS: 417). Not one religion from another but that greed splits apart a Muslim Babur from Muslim Lodis is Guru Nanak's timeless insight into the Mughal conquest. As noted by an eminent scholar, the four hymns on this major event are "unexcelled for their power of expression and moral keenness. His poetry has important social meaning. Nowhere else in contemporary literature are the issues of medieval Indian

situation comprehended with such clarity or presented in tones of greater urgency [9]."

The poetry of the Gurus does not whisk readers away into some world of Plato's pure forms; it is not headed towards heavens or another world out there. Their universal lyrics help make sense of particular social, economic, political, and religious problems that arise at any historical moment. But they convey knowledge through the aesthetics of poetry. As Guru Nanak said, "Only the relisher of fragrance can recognize the flower –*rasia hovai musk ka tab phul pachanaï*" (GGS: 725). Recognition (*pachanaï*) requires a physical act as well as a cognitive realization, so the sensuousness of poetry is the way to gain knowledge and insight. Teaching without teaching, the verses reach into the visceral hub where dictatorial rules and regulations never quite make it. According to Guru Angad, "ambrosial word reveals the essence of existence; it comes with knowledge and contemplation –*amrit bani tat vakhani gian dhian vici ai*" (GGS: 1243). For the Gurus, hearing/reading/singing their aesthetically charged lyrics would produce positive energy within the individual and ultimately make its way to all others around. Cognition of the singular Infinite would dissolve egotistic obsessions and promote love and compassion towards all beings in the world. The material and affective textures of the Gurus' verse aspire to heighten moral and ethical sensibilities. The harsh critic of poetry quite well knew its force. Plato banned the poets from his Republic because "poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up [10]." The Gurus offered melodic verses for the parched empathy and humanity they witnessed.

### Daily Sustenance

And so the inspiring poetry provides sustenance for the Sikhs. As the textual sources demonstrate, the Gurus were prolific. A segment from each feeds the community on a daily basis. Below are a few examples.

**Guru Nanak's Japu** is the morning hymn. It is recited at the break of dawn when the mind is fresh and the atmosphere is serene. Described as the ambrosial hour in the Japu, dawn is considered



most conducive to grasping the singular Reality named as Truth at its outset. The hymn launches readers into a deeper intensity through the realms of *Dharam*, *Gyan*, *Saram*, *Karam*, and *Sach* – Earth, Knowledge, Aesthetics, Action, and Truth. This fivefold journey is not an ascension into some higher regions beyond life and the world, but rather, a pulling of the Divine into the human situation. That One is known by refining moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual capacities. Thus life is lived in the truest sense – freely and expansively – as it would be in *Sach Khand*, the Realm of Truth. The Name of the Absolute is no different from experiencing Truth. This first prayer in the GGS encapsulates the fundamental philosophical and ethical beliefs of the Sikhs.

**Guru Angad's Shalok at the end of the Japu** is recited several times during the day by the devout. It is found on p. 8 and p. 146 of the GGS (the term *divas* changes slightly to *dinas* in the latter). It presents a memorable scene in which the “entire universe” (*sagal jagat*) with its variegated and complex multiplicity “plays” (*khele*) in the lap of “day and night, the two female and male nurses” (*divas rati dui dai daia*). The Japu hymn constitutes a remarkably organic textual body: while its prologue introduces the infinity of Being, its epilogue resonates humans and nature cozily nestled together on the Body of the metaphysical One. It also exemplifies how the different Gurus become a unanimous voice, inspiring readers both with spiritual joy and with the motivation to interact truthfully – in tune with the One Truth, their creator.

**Guru Amar Das' first five and final stanzas of Anand Sahib** are recited during every ceremony and rite of passage and are incorporated in the daily evening prayer. (For its poetic details, see entry on Anand Sahib.)

**Guru Ram Das's verses are a part of the evening prayer Rahiras and the nightly Kirtan Sohila.** The Fourth Guru extends the message of non-egotistical love: “*sakat hari ras sadu na jania tin antar haumai kanda hai* – the deluded do not know the taste of the elixir of love, they are pierced by the thorn of ego.” The selfish “me” and “mine” not only prick the individual like

a thorn but also injure relationships with others. **Guru Ram Das's Lavan composition** is also compelling. It solemnizes wedding nuptials in Sikhism. Here the Guru expresses the union between the couple as a passage into higher and higher circles of existence. The four stanzas of “Lavan” (meaning “circle”) describe a journey that begins with the resolve to do righteous action. In the second circle, the mystical melody is heard within the depths of the self. In the third circle, that feeling surges higher and the self becomes fully absorbed in the Divine love. As the fourth round commences, the divine sweetness begins to pervade the entire self and unites the individual with the Infinite Self. The union between a couple is endowed with macrocosmic significance.

**Guru Arjan's Mundavani** is the finale to the GGS. Part of daily liturgy, it envisions the Granth as a platter with three dishes: truth, contentment, and reflection. The poet who compiled the scripture urges that its materials simply not be eaten but savored. Thus tasting is vitally important to the cognition and experience of the Divine and to the development of individual morality. The language of eating and drinking sumptuously pervades the GGS. **Guru Arjan's Sukhmani**, a composition almost 2,000 lines in length, is artistically superb as well and very popular. *Sukh* means peace and *mani* could be either pearl or mind (from the word *man*), so the title can be translated as Pearl of Peace or Mind of Peace. The entire hymn extols the importance of Name.

The **Ninth Guru's shaloks** come towards the end of the GGS. These 57 couplets were composed shortly before the Guru's execution in 1675. They are prominent in the *bhog* ceremony with which each reading of the GGS concludes. Like his predecessors, he too praises those who enshrine the Divine in their selves because “Between the Divine and them, there is no difference!” (43) The Ninth Guru's usage of animal similes is very effective: “worship the divine single-mindedly, just like the faithful dog” (45), but “when there is pride in the heart, pilgrimages, fasts, charities, and other acts are as futile as an elephant's bath” (#46). Guru Tegh Bahadur's poetry is touching in its brevity and simplicity.

**Guru Gobind Singh's Jaap** is recited in the morning and is an essential part of the Sikh initiation ceremony. It is a poetic offering to the Divine. In 199 couplets, it is a spectacular profusion of divine attributes that flashed on Guru Gobind Singh's artistic consciousness. Interestingly, the Guru ends at couplet 199 rather than at a round figure to signify that there is no culminating point. The outpouring of words saluting the Infinite Reality is extremely quick. The Guru exalts the animating and life-generating One who flows through and interconnects the myriad creatures: "*namo sarab dese namo sarab bhes* – salutations to You in every country, in every garb" (Jaap: 66); again, "*ki sarbatr desai ki sarbatr bhesai* – You in every country, in every form" (Jaap: 117). Like Nanak's Japu, Guru Gobind Singh's Jaap rejoices in the presence of the Transcendent within the glorious diversity of the cosmos – "You are in water, You are on land – *jale hain thale hain*" (Jaap: 62); "You are the sustainer of the earth – *dhrit ke dhran hain*" (Jaap: 173) – and repeats with a slight variation, "*dharni dhrit hain* – sustainer of the earth you are" (Jaap: 178). Like his predecessors, the Tenth Guru recognizes the One as the universal vocal and kinetic rhythm: "You are the language of all languages – *samustal zuban hain*" (Jaap: 155). The poetry of the various Gurus is an aesthetic medium for absorbing the Being brought forth in Guru Nanak's Japu.

To conclude, the Sikh Gurus' poetry sets the spiritual process in motion. Pulsating with a passion for the Divine, the rhythmic beats move readers into a deeper intensity and communion with something much larger. "The poet," as Gadamer says, "is the archetype of human being... Therefore, the word, which the poet catches and causes to endure, does not mean just that artistic accomplishment through which one becomes or is a poet, but it also represents the essence of possible human experience. This allows the reader to be the I of the poet because the poet is the I which we all are [11]." Indeed, the Sikh Gurus open up the universal horizon: through their poetic voice, readers, listeners, and singers can relive their wondrous intimacy with the infinite One.

## Cross-References

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Anand Sahib](#)
- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Bhai Vir Singh (ed) (1977) Varan Bhai Gurdas. Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar, Var I: 32
2. Charles Wilkins (1962) College of the seeks (published in 1788) in Ganda Singh. Early European Accounts of the Sikhs. Calcutta, p 75
3. Singh N-GK (2012) Of sacred and secular desire. I.B. Tauris, London
4. For more details see Robin Rinehart (2011) Debating the Dasam Granth. Oxford University Press, and Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2005) The Birth of the Khalsa. SUNY
5. Gunindar Kaur (Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh) (1981) Physics and metaphysics of the Guru Granth Sahib. Sterling, New Delhi
6. Turner V (1969) The ritual process: structure and anti-structure. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, p 132
7. Bhai Gurdas, Var I: 38
8. Gadamer H-G (1989) Truth and method. Crossroad, New York, p 309
9. Singh H (1969) Guru Nanak and origins of the Sikh faith. Asia Publishing House, Bombay, p 206
10. Republic, Book X, 606
11. Misgeld D, Nicholson G (eds) (1992) Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history: applied hermeneutics. SUNY, Albany, p 27

---

## Political Authority

- [Hukumnama](#)

---

## Postcoloniality

Katy Pal Sian  
School of Social Sciences, Sociology, University of Manchester, UK

## Definition

The erosion of the west/non-west hierarchy in all aspects of social relations.

## Main Text

### Conceptualizing Postcoloniality

This piece will explore the relationship between Sikhs and postcoloniality by examining the interventions and mobilizations Sikhs have made in attempts to articulate alternative ways of being outside the colonial framing [1]. The field of postcoloniality itself has generated an extensive literature, ranging over disciplines such as literary studies, history, art, music, and cultural studies. In most of these cases, the postcolonial is often used descriptively, that is, to simply refer to a condition after colonialism. In this context, the postcolonial would arise at different times in different places, for example, India in 1947 and Ghana in 1961. In this chronological and empirical reading of post colonialism, the focus is often on the formerly colonized societies rather than on the colonizers.

Conceptually speaking, the postcolonial is more complex referring to the erosion or breakdown of the hegemonic west/non-west hierarchy; the west here is decentered; thus, the postcolonial condition allows a new space for articulating autonomous identities which have typically been negated and subjugated. To elaborate further, the postcolonial:

...[I]s not to be understood empirically as simply referring to the conventional etchings or endings of empire as a formal regime or set of institutions, but rather conceptually as a way of narrating the deregulated presences of past economic, political and cultural colonialities transformed within the postcolonial present to naturalise and depoliticise the world order. ([2], 16–17)

The postcolonial then illustrates both the boundaries and the lacking of a complete “anterior decolonization,” by creating spaces for possible sites of contestation; the postcolonial allows the articulation of a renewed challenge and resistance to overcome the vestiges of coloniality; in other words, the postcolonial “...question[s] and unsettle[s] Western practices of normalising, disavowing and depoliticising the contemporary colonial architecture of the world order” ([2], p. 17). The postcolonial as such opens up sites for contestation by critiquing the centrality of the west.

The first major critique of western imperialism which opened up avenues for such postcolonial thinking was developed by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism*. Orientalism refers to the study of the east through the eyes of a western representation; according to Said, it is the discourse through which the west represents the colonial “Other” or the “Orient” as subordinated peoples; this subsequently justifies, maintains, and furthermore reproduces an academic basis for material domination as he goes on to suggest, “...the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the west) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” ([2], p. 2); it “is an integral part of European material civilisation and culture” ([2], p. 2). Orientalism in this sense becomes a form of ideological colonialism and exploitation legitimized by the notion of the western man’s burden:

Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. ([3], 2)

Said conceptualizes Orientalism in three main ways which he claims are all interdependent. Firstly Said locates Orientalism within an academic framework which is the most typical designation for the discipline. The term Orientalism has been largely replaced by Oriental studies by contemporary scholars due to its ambiguity and connotations of “the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism” ([3], p. 2). Said maintains that “books are written and congresses held with ‘the Orient’ as their main focus, with the Orientalist in his new or old guise as their main authority” ([3], p. 2). In short, Said argues that “Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental” ([3], p. 2). Secondly, Said observes Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident” ([3], p. 2). This presents a dichotomous relationship in which emerges a distinction between the west and the east; such a hierarchical structure has continued to be reproduced and maintained by authors and scholars who through this framework are able

to construct and legitimize their position in relation to the east.

The third meaning of Orientalism “is something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two” ([3], p. 3). It is the notion that Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” ([3], p. 3). Critical of the persistent scholarly tradition and outsider or “Occident” assumptions of the east laced with racial prejudice and stereotypes, Said argues Orientalism is “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice” ([3], p. 73). Through this definition, Said presents Orientalism as more than just a subject; it becomes the very foundation to both explore and understand the unknown and unusual. Such differences have become the hegemonic articulations to understand the “Other.” Said seeks to understand how one can come to observe the “Other” or the Orient without common assumptions which are deeply embedded within western discourse which has continually created preconceived notions of peoples in the east without knowing them or their experiences, for example:

For a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. ([3], 11)

By writing about the east, the west came to own the knowledge, thus owned the Orient, in turn materialized an exploitative relationship in which the Orient was the passive, the subordinated, while the Occident became the dominant and the active. Such power enabled these hegemonic articulations of the Orient as inferior or backward to develop and perpetuate; in turn, the Orient is silenced, dismissed, or misrepresented through exteriority:

The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient. ([3], 21)

Following this critique, Ronald Inden (1990) observes how western scholars adopt “jungle metaphors” of “wildness, extremity and disorder”

([4], p. 2) to describe both Indians and their institutions and examines the process of the “othering” whereby “the essence of Western society is the free individual, that of India an imprisoning caste system” ([4], p. 3). India in this sense is thus represented as a depraved, uncivilized, and disintegrated nation lacking in the western ideals regarded as essential requirements to promote concepts of liberation and freethinking. However, in light of this, Inden also notes that the west “did not see India as an inferior land of the past, but as a superior land of the future” ([4], p. 48). India was portrayed as a land of great wealth and richness, an exotic place of fulfillment and pleasure, yet such representations proceeded to “other” India as a “dreamlike” and subsequently “irrational” state ([4], p. 48).

Inden argues that western scholars, particularly Hegel, have created several “overlapping images of the Orient or the East as the Other” ([4], p. 49). He suggests that such a relationship both divides the west from the non-west and also works to produce an image of the east as an exotic, unusual, and mysterious nation which has consequently “stripped Indians of their agency” ([4], p. 84). Conventional indological discourse has thus focused its attention “...upon the opposition between normative western practices and establishments against which South Asian ways of living appear distortions and aberrations” ([5], p. 2). By adopting tropes such as caste, kinship, and honor, such subjects become domesticated and in turn “...help to identify South Asian settlers as essentially ‘Indian’” ([5], p. 2). Such inexorable depictions typically present India as a land symbolic of spirituality, mysticism and sacredness, or on the other hand, we see India epitomized through ominous images of poverty, contamination, and burly disorder; this is a land whose subjects are either located within the realms of the exoticized or the banalized [6].

The construction of Sikhs across a range of both popular and scholarly discourses has been heavily plagued by attempts to locate Sikhs within a colonial gaze, a notion which refers to the “British experience of India” ([5], p. 2). According to Harjot Oberoi (1994), the historical experiences of Sikhs in the nineteenth century

have suffered from both “silence” and “negation” ([7], p. 30). Oberoi suggests that discourses on the historiography have persistently silenced and neglected Sikhs through an unrelenting failure to recognize religious, spiritual, and cultural diversity as nineteenth-century European scholars were essentially concerned in their quest to establish “what Sikhism ought to be like rather than what it was like” ([7], p. 31). Throughout history, the west has dominated attitudes and perceptions and thus maintained its own preconceived and universal assumptions of the east in order to exercise power and preserve its (ex)colonial precedence.

Sikhs have often been read through a colonial lens, while the landscape of nineteenth-century Sikh life has been reduced to nothing more than merely “a superfluous addition which has to be negated” ([7], p. 32). As such, Sikhs within this framework are read as a people without history with assumptions based upon “a tautological argument that ends up legitimising the discourse of the modern Sikh intelligentsia” ([7], p. 32). These discourses subsequently “prevent us from seeing the Sikhs as being in a world constantly constructed and reconstructed by them” ([7], p. 34).

### Sikh Reformists and Postcoloniality

The Sikh postcolonial response has not just been spearheaded by Anglophone writers in the west but also by Punjabi writers of two different types which include the Singh Sabha reformists and the Marxist Sikh reformists. Sikh reformist movements have thus played an important role in interrupting the western gaze; the impact they had on disrupting the surreptitious and essentializing colonial framework was significant in (re) articulations of Sikhness. The Singh Sabha founded in 1873 was the most influential Sikh reformist movement as it achieved the most successful reinterpretation of a Sikhism adapted to modernity ([8], p. 68).

This religious movement developed as a response to the proselytization of Hindus and Christians and aimed to both strengthen literacy and renew and revitalize the teachings of the Sikh Gurus through the production of religious text. Through their mastery of print culture ([9], p. 266), the Singh Sabhas were able to

communicate and circulate their works across a variety of registers with the use of British colonial support, as well as new forms of transportation, commerce, and communication in the chief form of the printing press ([9], p. 69). The arrival of the printing press along with the developments of the Singh Sabha movement enabled absolute authority to the Adi Granth whereby copies of the complete volume were made widely available ([10], p. 240).

This entry of Sikhs into modernity enabled the Singh Sabhas to initially give “expression to the cultural aspirations of an evolve’ class and helped generate its sub-culture. In doing so the Sabhas were in no way exceptional, but formed a part of a long chain of social processes that swept across the subcontinent, albeit with different time cycles, under colonial rule” ([7], p. 303). The movement influenced Sikh self-consciousness by reformulating and redefining both the doctrinal foundations of Sikhism and impacting the enunciation of Sikh identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ([9], p. 69). For Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (2011), the project of reform enacted by the Singh Sabha movement “...[E]ntailed much more than organizational changes to Sikh society. It also brought about fundamental changes in the Sikh psyche and ontology” [11].

Other key reformist movements critiquing the colonial framework came in the form of a more politicized Marxian-inspired discourse, established largely by the Ghadr movement. The Ghadr movement was founded among Sikh immigrants principally in Western Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. The movement took its name from the Urdu word for revolution and coalesced around a weekly journal entitled Ghadr; the journal and the politics it espoused was anti-colonial and specifically anti-English; its supporters included many Sikh ex-soldiers and ex-police who were in the forefront of resistance to racism by White Canadians. The Ghadr reform began to link the experience of racism by Sikhs in North America to a critique of colonialism globally. The message of the Ghadr movement began to circulate throughout the Indian diaspora and India itself. The movement agitated for workers’ rights as well as for the end of imperial rule ([12], pp. 168–192).



The significance of the movement lies in its secular temper, and unlike other armed resistance movements, the Ghadr movement, while socio-logically dominated by Sikhs, was not theologically dominated by any faith tradition; as such, its secularity marks the contrast with the deeply religious and spiritual Singh Sabha movement. The Ghadr movement helped to introduce into the Sikh imaginary a radical questioning of British imperial rule and the distancing of the Sikh community from their loyalty to the British Raj. The Ghadr movement marked the entry of Sikhs into an engagement with modernity explicitly through a Marxist-centered reading, and as a consequence, they did not rely upon Indic (indigenous) sources for purposes of mobilization and conceptual reactivation; instead they tended to reinforce the Orientalism inherent in Marxism and as such dismissed the Indic philosophically while holding on to it politically ([12], pp. 168–192).

Both religious (Singh Sabha) and atheistic (Marxist Sikh) responses made important interventions in unsettling the western/colonial gaze; however, they also gestured towards its affirmation. This demonstrates the dialectical relationship between the colonial and the postcolonial in which Sikh movements for renewal were entrapped. The development of Sikhism as a resource for political mobilization in the age of coloniality meant restructuring along the lines of modernity so that Sikhism became a religion in a world of other religions. The reform movements were postcolonial as a response to the impositions of colonialism and the attendant power-knowledge matrix which sought to reclassify Indic traditions implicitly or explicitly along a historical schema pioneered by Hegel with its culmination in the telos of a western horizon. However, a more radical reworking of the postcolonial logic also became available in which various reformist movements began to demonstrate the potential for the cultivation of a postcolonial imaginary.

These movements, however, were unable to allow this sense of the postcolonial to trump the postcolonial; as a consequence, their agency remained within the Orientalist logic which mitigated against their political efficacy as well as their ability to imagine Sikhism beyond a

Hegelian dialectic. An indication of what a postcolonial imaginary could hold for Sikhs can be found in the poetry of Harinder Singh Mahboob (1990) whose ambition was to reinvent the traditional Sikh idiom rather than import the rationalist enlightenment vocabulary of the western imperial enterprise. In this Mahboob opened the possibility for Sikh engagement with the modern which would not be beholden to the colonial framing of modernity [13].

### Postcolonial Sikhs

A postcolonial reading of Sikhs enables Sikhs to narrate their very being and take agency of their subjectivity; as Mandair (2001) suggests, we need:

...[T]o reinvent a theory and practice of communication based on the experience of a body that houses multiple and often incommensurable identities—Sikh and Western—resulting in the remaking of Western identity and theory in a manner not dissimilar to the way that many Jewish and other minority writers and thinkers have done. ([14], 69)

As such, a religious answer to the question of Sikhs and Sikhism is not enough, not because Sikhism is not a religion but precisely because the definition of a religion as a universal category is difficult to sustain ([9], p. 94; [15]). The notion of religion is a western and largely Orientalist construct and thus cannot be simply or rather methodically applied to account for “religions” of the non-west, as Oberoi notes:

Religion had never been reified in Indian society, as it had in Europe. It was a crucial part of life, but not something that could be disembodied and the objectified. The way people experienced reality, their modes of imagination and the vehicles through which knowledge was represented did not consist of references to an all-India community of believers. ([7], 418)

The category of religion is thus extremely limited when understanding Sikh being, and as Singh and Barrier (1999) point out “...if Sikhism is to be regarded as a world religion, this opens it up to the sort of expectations that others have come to take for granted of religions in the modern world” ([16], p. 133). Such a category then maintains the dominance of the global imperialist hegemonic project whereby subscribing to such a discourse:

...[F]orces Sikhs to accommodate themselves to the prevailing local ideologies and policies governing the extension of rights and the entailment of responsibilities of recognized religions. ([16], 133)

Similarly Tony Ballantyne (2006) explores the implications of “contextualizing Sikhism as a religion” which has traditionally served the interests of “British colonial knowledge” shaped by several factors: first, the certain assumptions they had about religion; second, the structure of religious collectives; and third, the blueprint of Christian history ([17], p. 41). The concept of religion emerged from European Christian encounters with non-European practices, and according to Talal Asad (1993), the very definition of religion refers to the historical outcome of distinct cultural and discursive practices ([15], p. 200; [17], p. 42). Such processes produced a hegemonic discourse of Christian thinking; this coupled with the enlightenment which sought to bring rationality, civility, and reason, establishing an empirical language to articulate a “universal” concept of religion. These processes were thus central in forging “understandings of cultural variation, religious differences, and the human condition” ([17], p. 42). Within this narrative, “...commentators framed Sikhism as an improvement of the increasingly degenerate forms of belief and ritual that they believed to characterise popular Hinduism” ([17], p. 44). Thus, what emerges are colonial attempts to articulate a systematic discourse to categorize and redefine “Other” religions against the European “enlightened” model of Christianity which sought to write, describe, and impose their own religious structure to narrate the history of the “Other” and legitimate their position of “superiority.”

Mandair similarly examines the problems of deploying the hegemonic “religious” discourse to identify non-Europeans; he suggests that the signifier religion works to recycle and instill the colonial relationship of west/non-west, Self, and Other. Also drawing upon the importance of Asad’s work, he comments that such an account is “...correct in emphasising the reproduction of religion as a site of postcolonial contestation” ([9], p. 94). Mandair proposes that it is fundamental to

question such a link which would enable the exposure of the perilous relationship between the “empirical and the imperial” ([9], p. 94). The work of Hegel here is worth noting with his focus on constructions of India and his influence in legitimizing this hegemonic discourse of religion to maintain the Self/Other distinction. The idea of Hegel as one of the main authors of a colonized worldview is well established in the literature [18]. Hegel provides a philosophical encapsulation of the various disparate experiences arising out of Europe’s engagement with non-European worlds.

As Mandair goes on to suggest Hegel’s lectures, on world history in particular, can be seen as a founding text of the European colonial worldview, where in these lectures Hegel reorganizes all historical development so that it culminates in the European experience, along the way, non-Europeans are placed in various positions of subordination; each non-European “civilization” represents both a specific set of cultural and historical developments and a stage towards European Christian “civilization.” India has a place within this schema which sees it more or less as a land of spirituality and excessive religiosity; it follows that Indian communities are to be marked by this discourse ([9], p. 97). Such a reading of Hegel points to his central role not only in formulating the various colonial subjectivities but also in influencing their extensions within the postcolonial context. Sikhs in this sense continue to be seen primarily in religious terms or as communities in which religion is central despite their migration and settlement globally; thus, the idea of the Sikhs as primarily a religious community, accessible via techniques of the anthropology of religion, is one of the major ways in which Sikh identity is conceptualized. This idea of Sikhs as a religious community continues to be empiricist and essentialist in which communal or individual Sikh behavior can be accounted for by reference to their insertion into a schema that Hegel would instantly recognize.

Mandair’s suggestion which endorses a postcolonial reading is for Sikhs to refuse to translate their sense of their spirituality into indological categories; thus, Sikhism is simply Sikhism; it is not comparable, traceable, or reducible – it is what

it is and not accessible except through the interior. Sikhs as a religious community, in which the sense of religion is established in contrast to European rationality, do not allow us to investigate the process of Sikh identification outside of the west/non-west split. The culturalist and essentialist pitfalls are all too evident. In other words, by continuing to simply state that Sikhs are primarily a religious community without examining the processes that lead to their constitution and maintenance, we are condemned to play out the colonial drama in a postcolonial setting.

The Sikh reformist movements both from the religious and secular wings paved the way for the articulation of Sikh agency no longer mired in colonial trappings. The critique of conventional studies of Orientalism, Indology, and Sikh studies has enabled us to see the dangers of reproducing the west/non-west framework; by challenging these hegemonic representations, we are able to engage seriously with postcoloniality. To establish a post-Orientalist discourse, the destabilization of the very framework which articulates Orientalism and Indology and its “Other” is central. A post-Orientalist discourse cannot thus be characterized simply by the reversal of Orientalism; rather, it signs itself by departing from the privileging of the west over the non-west and subsequently becomes a name in its own right. So, rather than subjects being written in a script without autonomy, without history, without voice, post-Orientalism enables the actor to articulate a language which no longer locates them through the eyes of the west; in short, the story is not a story to validate, endorse, and corroborate the hegemonic positioning of the west, and rather it rewrites, relocates, and remarks a new space for the non-west to lucidly speak as themselves [6]. A postcolonial reading of Sikhs marks a space in which Sikhs become agents rather than producers of data, that is, they do not legitimize the indulgent ethnography of anthropologists and imperialist scholars; rather, they politically construct and reconstruct their being. It follows then that Sikhs are not reflections of primordial communities but rather constellations of social actors held together by a political logic.

## Cross-References

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Sikh Studies](#)
- [Sikhism](#)
- [Singh Sabha](#)

## References

1. Sian KP (2009) The persistence of Sikh and Muslim conflict in diasporic context: the case of BrAsian Sikhs. PhD Thesis, Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds (Chaps 1 & 2)
2. Hesse B, Sayyid S (2006) The postcolonial political and the immigrant imaginary. In: Ali N, Kalra V, Sayyid S (eds) A postcolonial people: south Asians in Britain. Hurst and Company, London
3. Said E (1978) Orientalism. Penguin, London
4. Inden R (1990) Imagining India. Basil Blackwell, Cambridge
5. Sayyid S (2006) Br Asians: postcolonial people, ironic citizens. In: Ali N, Kalra V, Sayyid S (eds) A postcolonial people: south Asians in Britain. Hurst and Company, London
6. Sian K (2009) Slumdog millionaire: post-orientalist or brownsploitation? The Culture Craft. <http://the-culturecraft.wordpress.com/reviews/reviews-slumdog-millionaire/>
7. Oberoi H (1994) The constructions of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, Oxford
8. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
9. Mandair A (2006) (IM)possible intersections. In: Ali N, Kalra V, Sayyid S (eds) A postcolonial people, south Asians in Britain. Hurst and Company, London
10. Grewal JS (1998) Contesting interpretations of the Sikh tradition. Manohar, New Delhi
11. Mandair A (2011) Valences of the dialectic: uninheriting the religion-secular binary in Sikh studies and beyond. University of Michigan
12. Singh K (1996) A history of the Sikhs, volume 2: 1839–1974. Oxford University Press, London
13. Singh P (2008) Experiences of desertion: locating the works of Harinder Singh Mahboob. Sikh Form 4(2):115–131
14. Shackle C, Singh G, Mandair A (2001) Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity. Surrey, Curzon
15. Asad T (1993) Genealogies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
16. Singh P, Barrier G (1999) Sikh identity: continuity and change. Manohar, New Delhi

17. Ballantyne T (2006) Between colonialism and diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world. Duke University Press, Durham

18. Bernasconi R (1998) Hegel at the court of the Ashanti. In: Barnett S (ed) Hegel after Derrida. Routledge, London

**Punjab**

- [Relics \(Sikhism\)](#)

**Prachar**

- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)

**Punjabi Language**

- [Vir Singh \(Bhai\)](#)

**Precision**

- [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

**Punjabi Literature**

- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)

# R

---

## Raag

- [Ragas \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Raaga

- [Ragas \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Rababi

- [Ragis \(in Sikh Kirtan Tradition\)](#)

---

## Race (Sikhism)

Katy Pal Sian  
School of Social Sciences, Sociology, University  
of Manchester, UK

### Definition

A problematic category used to classify humans based on inherited physical and/or cultural differences.

## Main Text

### Sikhs as a “Martial Race”

The category of “race” is a contested concept rooted in assumptions that particular ethnic groups have biologically inheritable characteristics; as such the term “race” refers to a set of “objective” phenotypical features, used to classify people based on appearance, that is, skin color, nose shape, and build, as well as cultural and ethnic “traits.” The notion of “race” has come under considerable critique for its essentialism and reductivism. Few today subscribe to such racial science discourses, conceding instead to the idea that “race” is something socially constructed; thus, it is not “real” nor does it have any fixed meaning.

Sikhs have a complex relationship with the category of “race,” which dates back to the colonial era, in which the British Empire appointed Sikhs as belonging to the “martial race.” The “martial race theory” was based on the belief by many British soldiers in the nineteenth century that particular “races” in India including Sikhs, Punjabis, Pathans, and Gurkhas were innately the more superior fighters compared to other groups. The ideology of “martial races” mirrored wider British assumptions of Indian society, that is, the British identified the significance of the Indian caste system in classifying particular groups along the lines of ability and aptitude; thus, these divisions were largely heightened and intensified by the British. ([1], p. 60)



As the British army reallocated its focus from domestic issues of the Raj to the protection from external threats, officials put more energy into maximizing the strength of its army. This meant that recruitment became centered upon a few chosen groups who were regarded to be more efficient and prepared for fighting the enemy from outside. This recruitment strategy soon became embedded in the ‘martial race’ ideology.” ([1], p. 69)

Sikhs and their affiliation with Britain and the British Empire are both multifaceted and intimate. Although the British defeated the Sikhs twice in the mid-nineteenth century in the first and second Anglo-Sikh wars 1845–1846 and 1848–1849, commanders were full of praise and admiration for the courage and bravery presented by Sikh soldiers. ([1], p. 61) Sikhs as such were seen as a warrior-like collective with military efficiency and European-like organization and training; they were thus regarded in high esteem as a “martial” people. ([1], p. 61) As the “martial race theory” became established, recruitment into the colonial army became guided by manuals, textbooks, and anthropological studies based entirely upon imperialistic stereotypes and racism in which particular groups were marked out quite literally as possessing inherent qualities such courage, masculinity, loyalty, and bravery which made them more likely to be chosen to enter the army. Such a system of recruiting meant that a science of classification was prescribed in which specific ethnic groups were deemed more “martial” than others. ([1], p. 65) Sikhs were one of these groups celebrated by the British as belonging to the “martial” race.

### **Sikhs, “Race” and Contemporary Politics**

The Sikh diaspora thus has an ambivalent association with Britain, serving in the British army and being regarded as the “favored” sons of the Empire. The incorporation of Sikhs into the British imperialist apparatus facilitated migration to Britain in the wake of the Second World War and associated reconstruction labor shortages. Following the collapse of British colonialism and India’s independence of 1947, many Sikhs migrated and settled in the UK. However, the Sikh community was soon to learn that they

were not necessarily welcomed with open arms despite their long service and loyalty. In the earlier phases of migration, Sikh men often found it easier to get employed if they took off their turbans, but in 1959 when a Sikh was banned from wearing his turban in the workplace, the issue became political as the Sikh community launched a number of campaigns and protests to gain the right to wear turbans at work. ([2], p. 38) A more recent example highlighting the struggles and shifts in multicultural policy can be demonstrated with the case of a Sikh pupil’s expulsion from school in Wales for wearing the *kara* in November 2007 [3]; however, in July 2008 the student won her battle as “Mr Justice Stephen Silber concluded the school was guilty of indirect discrimination under race relations – Sikhs are a race – and equality laws.” [3]

Sikhs are protected with Jews under the Race Relations Act (1976) which states that it is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of color, race, and nationality and on the grounds of ethnic or national origins, in the fields of employment, education, housing, and the provision of goods, facilities, and services. This protection of Sikhs under Britain’s Race Relation Act marks Sikhs out once again as occupying a racial status, as it is inscribed literally that “Sikhs are a race.”

The classification of Sikhs as a “race,” however, is not so easy to apply outside of the British Isles. The idea that Sikhs constitute a common “race” is problematic for a number of reasons; firstly, not only does it fly in the face of the general critique of very notion of “race” with its associated manifestation of racial science discourses and subsequent racial stereotyping, but secondly, it does not allow for the possibility of Gora Sikhs or Sindhi Sikhs who cannot be said to belong to the same descent group as Punjabi Sikhs. (By Gora Sikhs I mean white Sikhs, that is, those of recent European heritage who have converted to Sikhism; one of the largest community of Gora Sikhs is to be found in the United States. Sindhi Sikhs refers to a large community of Sikhs in the Sindhi province of Pakistan.) As such, essentialist accounts which have attempted to classify Sikhs along racial lines remain largely futile and

ineffectual when narrating Sikhs as a people. While it may be useful to see the formation of people in terms of a distinct set of features, there is no reason to assume that such features need to coalesce around a racial essence.

It is clear throughout history marked initially by their encounter with colonial Britain, Sikhs have undergone a series of attempts to categorize them as a “race” first and foremost, a legacy that has maintained within contemporary Britain with the Race Relations Act which legislates their very being as constitutive of a “race.” However, the notion of Sikhs as a “race” cannot be so easily ascribed beyond the British context and thus remains a simplistic and obtuse reading of Sikhs. Rather than seeing Sikhs as a racial category, it is perhaps more useful to see Sikhs instead as a constructed community.

## Cross-References

► [Migration, Sikh](#)

## References

1. Yong T (2005) *The Garrison state: the military, government and society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947*, Sage series in modern Indian history. Sage, London
2. Brah A (2006) The ‘Asian’ in Britain’. In: Ali N, Kalra V, Sayyid S (eds) *A postcolonial people: South Asians in Britain*. Hurst and Company, London
3. Gillan A (2008) ‘Proud to be Welsh and a Sikh’. Schoolgirl wins court battle to wear religious bangle. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/jul/30/schools.religion>. Last Accessed May 2011

---

## Ragas (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Raag](#); [Raaga](#)

## Definition

A melodic form in traditional Hindustani music. Each *raga* consists of a theme that express an emotion and based upon that emotion sets forth a tonal system. Improvisation of this tonal system allows for the development of a whole system of raga families.

## Raga: The Guru Granth Sahib’s Organizing Principle

The Guru Granth’s main body of text (1,430 pages) is arranged not according to concept or narrative but according to musical measures known as *ragas*. [7] A *raga* (along with the *tala* or rhythm) is a traditional melodic type in Hindustani music, consisting of a theme that expresses an aspect of spiritual feeling and sets forth a tonal system on which variations are improvised within a prescribed framework of typical progressions, melodic formulas and rhythmic patterns. Far from being supplementary to the text, the role of the *raga* and *tala* is central to its organization, since according to Indian aesthetic theory, each musical *raga* in combination with *tala* evokes a mood that has its own distinctive flavour (*rasa*), which may vary across a spectrum that ranges from adoration and rejoicing to desolation and entreaty. [1, 4, 6, 7, 12] To render the *raga* correctly in performance (*kirtan*) is to correctly express one mood or set of emotions and not another. [9, 11] Guru Nanak and his successors wished their hymns to be sung to *ragas* that expressed the emotions of the text, and the performance style to be compatible with the meaning of the hymn. As such, the Sikh Gurus were well versed in contemporary styles of Indian music and encouraged the development of musicality alongside the regular Sikh practices. [5, 7, 8, 10]

Each hymn in the Guru Granth Sahib is set to a predefined *raga* which, when sung, affect their lyrical interpretation of the text via the sets of emotive association the *raga* entails. [2, 3] The musicality of the Guru Granth and other early texts in the Sikh tradition such as the Dasam Granth and the poems of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nandlal

place another layer of limitation placed upon interpretation (sung or spoken) such that the aesthetic-spiritual aspect of the performance must be maintained. The Gurus aimed to convey experience through *ragas* because the feelings and moods each *raga* entails is indicative of an aspect of consciousness that inevitably escapes reduction to conceptuality. [7, 8, 10, 11] The purpose of setting the Guru's words to a *raga* and *tala* is to make an impression on the ego or self-consciousness of the listener's mind in such a way that it is forced into dialogue with its unconscious aspect, the heart or soul. [1, 4, 7, 9] When these two different aspects of the mind speak to each other, it is said to be attuned to the oneness of all existence. It is important to remember the significance of this lyrical dimension when approaching the record of the Gurus' teaching which is contained within the text of their hymns as they appear, silently, on the printed page. [4, 7]

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Kirtan](#)
- ▶ [Nitnem](#)
- ▶ [Sanskara](#)

## References

1. Cole OW (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon, London
2. Kohli SS (1992) A conceptual encyclopedia of Guru Granth Sahib. Manohar, Delhi
3. Kohli SS (1996) Dictionary of Guru Granth Sahib. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
4. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
5. Mansukhani GS (1982) Indian classical music and Sikh Kirtan. Delhi, Oxford
6. Qureshi R (1986) Sufi music of India and Pakistan: sound, context, and meaning in qawwali. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
7. Shackle C and Mandair A (2005) Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from Sikh Scripture. Routledge, London
8. Singh G (1995) Gurmat Sangeet. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh H (1998) The encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala
10. Singh G (2001) Sikh musicology: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and hymns of the human spirit. Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi
11. Singh A, Singh G (1995) Gurbani Sangit Prachin Rita Ratanawali. Punjabi University, Patiala
12. Srivastava I (2008) A practical guide to North Indian classical vocal music. Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi

---

## Ragis (in Sikh Kirtan Tradition)

Nirinjan Khalsa

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[Kirtaniya](#); [Kirtankar](#); [Rababi](#)

## Definition

Sikh devotional musicians. Commonly refers to Sikh male professional musicians of Gurbani Kirtan. A singer of *ragas* (emotive melodic patterns)

## Main Text

### Contemporary Ragis

Sikh devotional practice employs *ragi* musicians to disseminate its teachings to the Sikh *panth* (community) through the emotive medium of music. Ragis sing *Gurbani Kirtan* (Sikh devotional hymns) enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (hymnal scripture as enduring Guru) which contains tenets and panegyrics expressed by the ten Sikh *Gurus* (spiritual teacher-leaders) as well as other Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu saint-poets. The term *ragi* is derived from the term *raga* (emotive melodic patterns) which comes from the Sanskrit word *rang* (to dye or color). [8] Ragi therefore signifies a singer of emotive raga melodies which, in the mystical sense of the term, dye the self in the color red of love for the Beloved.

Today the term *ragi* refers to Sikh musicians who sing in *Gurdwaras* (Sikh temples), homes, or other venues for *sangat* congregational worship services and life-cycle ceremonies. The modern *ragi* is normally a member of a three-person *jatha* group comprised of a main singer seated in the center playing the *harmonium* (reed organ) and a secondary vocalist also playing the harmonium accompanied by a tabla percussionist. The *ragi jatha* trio has become the standard ensemble for professional Sikh musicians. In the Gurdwara the *ragis* are seated to the side of the Guru Granth Sahib, facing both the Guru and the *sangat*. This customary position illustrates the authority of the *ragis* to disseminate the Gurus' *Shabad* (lit. Word) through music to the *sangat* (Fig. 1).

### Professional Ragi Jatha

Many Gurdwaras worldwide employ *ragi jathas* to perform *kirtan* for daily worship and Sunday services although nonprofessional *sangat* congregation members are also able to perform *kirtan*. Male *ragis* are predominantly employed by a particular Gurdwara where they earn a salary

along with room and board. It is interesting to note that to date women have not been employed as professional *ragis* in the Gurus' courts, the Harimandir Sahib, or in local Sikh Gurdwaras although they continue to sing Gurbani Kirtan solo or in *jatha* ensembles.

*Ragis* are hired to perform life-cycle ritual ceremonies for a birth, marriage, death or for ventures such as a new home or business. These ceremonies are held in the Gurdwara, homes of *sangat* community members, or other venues where the Guru Granth Sahib is always present. *Ragis* also spend time traveling to different kirtan *darbar* and *samelan* gatherings.

As a sign of respect for their service to the communal act of worship, *ragis* are also monetarily compensated by the *sangat* via donations given directly from the listeners during the kirtan performance. The role of the *ragi* is to impart the message of the Gurus' *bani* to the *sangat* in a manner it can be easily understood and imbibed. To ensure the poetic hymns of the *bani* are being grasped by the *sangat*, *ragis* often give some *viakhiya* (exposition on the meaning of the



**Ragis (in Sikh Kirtan Tradition), Fig. 1** Ragis performing Gurbani Kirtan at Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India (Photo taken by author, Nirinjan Khalsa, 2011)

gurbani) during their singing performance or give a *parman* (reference of a similar gurbani line found in another *shabad*) to emphasize the message being conveyed. [3]

### Ragi Repertoire

The contemporary *Sikh Rahit Maryada* code of conduct states the manner in which *ragis* should transmit the Gurus' bani to the Sikh sangat. [13] Chapter five article six lays out the following four rules: (1) In the *sangat*, Gurbani Kirtan can only be performed by a Sikh. (2) Gurbani Kirtan means singing the *shabad* in traditional *raga* musical measures. (3) In the *sangat* congregation only Gurbani (hymns found in the *Guru Granth Sahib* or Tenth Gurus' *Dasam Granth*) can be sung, with exposition taken from Bhai Gurudas and Bhai Nand Lal's *bani*. (4) When singing the *shabad* in *jotian* (folk tunes) or in *raga* melody, it is improper to add extraneous or improvised lines. In the *shabad*, only the lines given should be repeated and sung.

The Sikh Rahit Maryada was formalized by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1945, instituting a set of rules for the appropriate performing of Gurbani Kirtan. While the first and second rulings (re)define who is allowed to sing and what is allowed to be sung, the third and fourth standardize the Gurbani Kirtan repertoire. Apart from having to sing Gurbani Kirtan compositions from the sources mentioned in the Sikh Rahit Maryada and specific compositions for ritual functions, *ragis* are able to choose which Gurbani Kirtan composition they will sing based on the *raga* which they feel match the time of day, occasion, or mood of the sangat. Still, there are particular *shabads* which are a part of the daily rituals held in most Gurdwaras such as *Asa di Vaar* sung at dawn and *Anand Sahib* sung at the end of every devotional service.

At the *Harimandir Sahib* (also known as the Golden Temple, the main Sikh temple and seat of musical authority located in Amritsar, Punjab), the daily singing of Gurbani Kirtan is divided into eight *chaunkis* (musical sessions) where particular *ragas* are sung which correlate to the three-hour period of each *chaunki* [15] (Fig. 2). Most *shabads* sung in Gurbani Kirtan are found in the

Guru Granth Sahib under the particular *raga* heading in which the *shabad* was composed. *Ragis* who sing at the Harimandir Sahib choose which *shabad* they will sing based on the *raga* that correlates to that particular *chaunki*. Many *ragis* compose the *shabads* in the same *raga* as prescribed by the *raga* heading in which the hymn is found in Guru Granth Sahib. However, there are both vintage *shabad reets* (heritage compositions) and contemporary *shabads* which have been composed in *ragas* other than as prescribed in the Guru Granth Sahib. This allows the same *shabad* to be sung at different times of day and not simply at that time prescribed by its *raga* heading. Overall, *ragis* usually make musical choices in response to the tastes of the listening *sangat* members. Because of this, modern professional *ragis* have stylistically adapted the way in which they sing Gurbani Kirtan in an effort to effectively disseminate the Gurus' bani to the sangat. When *ragis* gain the favor of the *sangat* members, they become popular figureheads within the Sikh community.

### Transmitting the Gurus' Bani: From Rababis to Ragis

The history of conveying *Gurbani* (the Gurus' hymns) through song started with the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, born in 1469 to a Hindu family in a Punjabi town outside of Lahore in modern-day Pakistan. Around the age of thirty Nanak had an illuminative experience regarding the Ultimate nature of Reality. He expressed his realization through poetic verse in *Japji*, the seminal prayer for Sikhs that is found on page one of the Guru Granth Sahib and is the first prayer of the day recited before sunrise in the *amrit vela*. In line with the *bhakti* tradition of devotional worship, Guru Nanak encouraged the practices of loving remembrance of the One through *jap* (recitation), *simran* (meditation), and *kirtan*. He prescribed these practices which are transformative in nature and ever present rather than ritual acts which cause the mind (ego) to create worldly attachments. Not only did Guru Nanak teach his followers to sing Gurbani Kirtan as a communal practice of worship but also to use music as a tool to enlighten the consciousness, which dispels the ego and merges the self with the Ultimate Reality of One.





**Ragis (in Sikh Kirtan Tradition), Fig. 2** Chardi Kala Jatha performing Gurbani Kirtan at Harimandir Sahib during the Bilawal Chaunki (6–9 a.m.) (Photo: taken by author, Nirinjan Khalsa, 2011)

After his illuminative experience Guru Nanak, in the late fifteenth century, began his *udasis* (tours) to spread his message of the Oneness of the Ultimate Reality through song. Guru Nanak was accompanied by Bhai Mardana, a Muslim *mirasi* minstrel who played the stringed *rabab* (a *rebek*-stringed instrument played by plucking or bowing). Thus Bhai Mardana became the first *rababi* musician in a long line of professional Muslim *rababis* who transmitted Gurbani Kirtan to the Sikh panth. Previously Muslim *mirasis* (service musicians) were not a respected class, but Guru Nanak gave them a respectful place within the Sikh panth as *rababis*. [19] The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan, showed the Muslim *rababis* further respect by including in the Sikh scripture three of Bhai Mardana's hymns in *Raga Bihaghara* (page 553) [18] as well as a hymn in *Raga Ramkali* (page 966) [18] by two other *rababi* descendants, Bhai Satta and Balwand, who served in the courts of the third through fifth Gurus. By including into the Sikh scripture the hymns of the *rababis* along with those of the saint-poets of diverse backgrounds, illustrates the equality and

unity of thought as carried through Guru Nanak, continued by the succeeding Sikh Gurus, and now maintained in the Guru Granth Sahib as the moral standard for the Sikh panth.

The tradition of singing the praises of the One was continued by the Sikh Gurus who themselves sang and played *jori-pakawaj* (percussion) and *tanti saaz* (stringed instruments) such as *rabab*, *saranda*, *taus*, *dilruba*, and *tanpura*. The Gurus also employed *rababi* musicians in their courts to disseminate their message of Oneness through experiential song sung in emotive *raga* melodies to the ever-growing Sikh panth. The Gurbani hymns were originally sung before being written into *pothi* (books), which were then compiled into the Adi Granth (first or original book) by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev in 1604. [11] The Adi Granth's essential experiential and performative aspect is highlighted by its organization according to the 31 *ragas* in which each poetic hymn was sung. The role of the *rababi*, and succeeding *kirtaniya* and *ragi* singers of the Gurus' *bani*, was to imbibe the panth with an experience of the intangible Word through Gurbani Kirtan.

In 1708 the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, rather than passing on the guruship to a human successor, instead invested the guruship in the Adi Granth which then became the Guru Granth Sahib. With this act, the *bani* or *shabad* as Guru became the teacher and ultimate authority for the Sikhs, for whom the *rababis*, *kirtanias*, and *ragis* were the primary transmitters.

Although the modern Rahit Maryada states that only Sikhs can perform Gurbani Kirtan, the first professional musicians of Sikh devotional music were not Sikh *ragis* but were actually Muslim *rababi* musicians employed in the Gurus' courts starting in the late fifteenth century with Bhai Mardana, the rabab accompanist of Guru Nanak. It was not until the famous *rababis* Bhai Satta and Balwand temporarily fell out of favor with Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, that members of the Sikh sangat were bestowed with the honor of leading the congregation in singing the Gurus' *bani*. [19] This new group of Sikh *kirtaniya* musicians were musically adept in singing the Gurbani Kirtan praises of the creator, [8] and Gurbani Kirtan began to migrate away from the exclusive domain of *rababis*.

### Modernity and National Music Reform

The Sikh Guru period lasted from 1499 to 1708 during which time music evolved and developed under the creation and instruction of ten consecutive Gurus as well as the Muslim *rababi* and Sikh *kirtaniya* singers who transmitted the Gurus' *bani* to the sangat congregation. After the Guru era, the Sikh community and its music underwent many changes due to a continuously evolving Indian political environment with the Islamic rule of the Mughal Empire from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and British colonialism during the seventeenth to twentieth centuries which culminated in the partition of India in 1947. During partition, religious tensions escalated as much of the Sikh-dominated Punjab region of Northern India was ceded to form the new Islamic nation of Pakistan. The partitioning of India's land and religious communities separated the Muslim *rababi* musicians from their principal role in Sikh devotional practice. Until partition, Muslim *rababis* had served as professional musicians at

the Harimandir Sahib since its establishment in the early seventeenth century starting with Bhai Satta and Balwand, followed by Bhai Babak, and then in 1721 Bhai Mani Singh regularized the *kirtan chaunkis* and the official employment of *rababis*, *kirtanias*, and *ragis* at the Harimandir Sahib. [4] (See *Punjab De Prasad Ragi Rababi* by Balbir Singh Kanwal for a comprehensive list and biodata of historical and contemporary *rababis*, *kirtanias*, and *ragis*.) [2]

With the new physical division imposed by partition, most *rababi* musicians were forced to leave their posts at the golden Harimandir Sahib temple, although a few stayed and converted to Sikhism. The physical division also motivated a religious partition where, to this day, only Sikh males have been allowed to play inside the Harimandir Sahib. The Sikh Rahit Maryada dictated the exclusion of non-Sikh musicians which was adopted at the Harimandir Sahib, the seat of Sikh musical authority, and by Gurdwaras worldwide. This shift from *rababis* being the primary transmitters of the Gurus' *bani*, to having Gurbani Kirtan solely under the purview of Sikh *ragis*, directly correlated to reformist initiatives during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century by the Hindu-dominated Nationalist movements who desired a country purified of British rule and Islamic influences. [9, 21]

A concerted effort was made by nationalist reformist groups to effectively remove Indian music making from its Muslim influences with emphasis placed on new forms of musical pedagogy, aesthetics, and varying levels of democratic accessibility. Musical reform directly affected the transmission of musical knowledge, musical performance, and its reception by the new public as patron with diverse tastes and musical knowledge. Sikh music making was influenced by the reformist strategies which promoted new forms of musical pedagogy, instrumentation, and technological advancement, enabling a larger portion of the Sikh sangat access to music making, which had the adverse effect of disregarding the high parameter of musicality promoted by the Gurus' courts.

Up until the eighteenth century, Gurbani Kirtan was primarily composed in the four-part (*asthai*, *antra*, *sanchari*, *abhog*) musical structure of the

devotional cum classical *dhrupad* genre found in North Indian Vaishnava temple traditions. Still, the folk styles such as *jotian* (congregational) and *vaar* (ballad) singing along with the *alahnian* (death) and *ghorian* (marriage) songs for life-cycle ceremonies remained popular modes of Gurbani Kirtan transmission since Guru Nanak's time. The modern classical *khyal* genre of embellished and improvised musical patterns became popular in the eighteenth century and was then adopted by singers of Gurbani Kirtan. During this time *kirtanias* and *rababis* were given the patronage of the Gurus' court, royal courts, religious trusts, and historical shrines as respected artists and spiritual mediators whose prime purpose was to share and preserve the intangible musical heritage as given by the Sikh Gurus. Since the primary method of transmitting the Sikh teachings was through Gurbani Kirtan, the musicians held an important role in Sikh practice. The *sangat* audience often consisted of educated listeners who reveled in the intricacies and subtleties of the Indian classical genres such as *dhrupad* and *khyal*. Before the rise of modern popular music, Indian musicians worked to orally maintain and transfer the music of their predecessors. The *guru-shishya parampara* tradition of transmitting musical knowledge orally from teacher to student was India's primary pedagogic mode. This method of musical education created master musicians who carried on the legacies of their particular school and genre. During the British colonial period in the late nineteenth century, popular musical styles that appealed to a less specialized audience began to appear, gradually replacing the classical genres, instrumentations, and pedagogic practices of Gurbani Kirtan transmission.

### Modern Popularization of Gurbani Kirtan and the Ragi Profession

Around the time of India's Independence in 1947, with the dissolution of courtly patronage and the increasing popularity of film, recording, and radio technology, the devotional musician as specialist gave way to the devotional musician as professional. In order to make a living wage, musicians had to tailor their art to the new public market as patron. [10] The rise of the film industry created

a standardized content which appealed to a pan-regional audience. [6] Singers could now gain notoriety by incorporating the new, catchy film tunes in their musical repertoire. [7] The popularization of North Indian music through the film and recording industries created a hegemonic musical style maintained by most musical recordings with a main vocalist accompanied by harmonium and tabla. [10] This consolidated ensemble, with a stylized vocal and a memorable tune, was the formula that most appealed to the large urban working class market. [10] This prevalent film-originated sound became the preferred musical aesthetic and was subsequently adopted by both the Sikh community and professional *ragi jathas*. Gurbani Kirtan melodies became less intricate, where they were sung in either light *raga* or no *raga* and sometimes taken from Hindi film tunes. Though seemingly innocuous to the modern *kirtan* audience, the traditional musicians and listeners see film tunes as antithetical to the meditative purpose of Gurbani Kirtan because they cause the listener's mind to recall the film's scene and mood rather than the bani's meaning. [5]

The authors of film music prided themselves in being able to create catchy tunes that their audience could easily identify with and parrot. [6] By marketing music to the largest audience for mass public appeal, the music industry created a new homogenized listening audience. In effect, the popularization of the recording industry set the stage for a new attitude toward Gurbani Kirtan. The purchasing power of the newly emerging Sikh middle class no longer patronized older forms sung in *raga* melody accompanied by string instruments but instead preferred the popular aesthetic of *ragi jathas* who performed simplified tunes accompanied by the harmonium (aka *vaja* or wind organ) and tabla.

Specifically, the harmonium (invented in Paris in the nineteenth century and subsequently introduced to India by Christian missionaries) became popular during modernity's homogenization of the Indian musical sphere because it was easier to learn, tune, and transport than traditional stringed instruments. No longer did people have to spend years perfecting the art of singing and instrumentation. Instead, within a short period,

a Sikh could make the career choice to learn the harmonium, pick up tunes from recordings, and become a *ragi*. It was no longer a requirement that these professionalized Sikh musicians be highly trained musicians. Rather than gaining success through musical mastery, recording technology enabled *ragis* to find commercial success and popularity through the sale of compact discs and the worldwide accessibility of satellite television and the Internet.

Overall the aesthetics of Gurbani Kirtan and its method of transmission to the Sikh sangat congregation were affected by the British modernizing project which introduced to the Indian musical sphere new instruments such as the harmonium [10]; new technology such as the radio, recording, and film industries [6]; and new institutionalized educational styles through musical notation. [1] This had the dual effect of creating a more democratic sphere of musical production, consumption, and education while at the same time creating a common-denominator music [6] to appeal to the new public marketplace as patron. [10] Consequently, the *kirtaniya* and *rababi* musician as specialists whose musical education and artistry had been a valuable asset under courtly patronage gave way to the less-educated musician as professional who now catered to the tastes of a wide and diverse purchasing public.

### From Ragi to Kirtaniya: A Contemporary Revival

Contemporary “*kirtaniya-ragi*” musicians have attempted, since the early 1990s, to revive musical virtuosity in Gurbani Kirtan and the *ragi* profession. In doing so it is their goal to inspire a sense of prestige for the Sikh musical heritage in the next generation of Sikhs who were raised without a communal memory of Gurbani Kirtan sung in the *raga*-based *dhrupad* genre accompanied by the stringed instruments and *jori-pakawaj* percussion. These revivalists view *raga* as central to the practice of Gurbani Kirtan due to the musicological organization of the Guru Granth Sahib according to the *raga* title under which each Gurbani Kirtan *shabad* is found. [16] They promote the perspective that the authors of the Guru Granth Sahib composed their *bani* hymns in

emotive ragas, and therefore singing in *raga* is the most efficacious way to convey the Gurus’ message. [14] Because of this, the revivalists prefer singing with the accompaniment of stringed instruments *rabab*, *taus*, *saranda*, and *dilruba* which are able to emulate the human voice and the intricately subtle modulations of the *raga* melodies. The main vocalist can be seen playing one of these instruments including the four-stringed *tanpura*, which provides the singer with a drone of the major notes in the *raga* being sung (Fig. 3). The harmonium’s fixed tonal nature is viewed as especially problematic when attempting to sing *raga* music as it cannot produce the 22 *shruti* (microtones) needed to evoke the nuanced intonations of each *raga* melody. [20] Nevertheless, the harmonium is currently the prevalent instrument used in Gurbani Kirtan; therefore many “*kirtaniya-ragis*” are seen playing the harmonium while accompanied by stringed instruments in an effort to bridge both contemporary and traditional stylistic preferences.

The revivalist effort to re-classicize Gurbani Kirtan can now be witnessed at the Harimandir Sahib which currently employs seven *dilruba* players to accompany the *ragi jathas* who are encouraged to sing Gurbani Kirtan in *raga*. These *dilruba* players, along with many *ragi jathas* employed at historic Gurdwaras, are graduates of Sikh musical institutions which have become central to the promotion of classical modes of Gurbani Kirtan as part of reformist strategies to make a purely Sikh musical genre.

### The Modern Institutionalization of Musical Education

The modernizing project of nineteenth- to twentieth-century India brought western models of religious ideology, discourse, pedagogy, and practices. Traditional aesthetics were replaced with more accessible musical formats, in effect taking the Sikh community into the twenty-first century without a communal memory of traditional forms of Gurbani Kirtan. Nevertheless, a few musicians and headmasters of *vidyalas* (educational institutions) remained, who themselves had been trained in the more traditional *guru-shishya parampara* educational system





**Ragis (in Sikh Kirtan Tradition), Fig. 3** Professor Kartar Singh of Gurmat Sangeet Academy singing at the 2011 Baisakhi celebration at Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib in

Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India (Photo: taken by author, Nirinjan Khalsa, 2011)

where musical knowledge is orally transmitted directly from the *guru* (teacher) to the *shishya* (student). These contemporary memory bearers maintained the memory of how the complex musical aesthetics were used to experientially convey the deep significance of the *bani* to the *sangat*. These traditionally educated musicians became educators at musical schools such as *vidyala* institutions of learning, colleges, and universities to teach the vintage *shabad reet* compositions, classical *raga* forms, and stringed instrumentation to the next generation of *ragis* who in turn can inspire a new generation of *sangat* patrons.

However, with the popularization of Gurbani Kirtan and the *ragi* profession, the traditional educators also had to acknowledge the new tastes of the diverse, purchasing audience. Teaching in musical institutions can be seen as antithetical for those teachers who themselves underwent the traditional *guru-shishya* educative process because of the way students are ushered through a standardized educative system without enough time for specialized attention to develop a student's

musical expertise. While there are teachers at these institutions who try to uphold the high parameter of musical education, it is difficult in the modern-day environment where time constraints and financial requirements are placed on the students and institutions. These Indian male students have pressures from their families to go through a program quickly, so they can enter the work force and gain employment as a *ragi* to support their family and ensure their marriage prospects. Due to economic factors most students and their families are unwilling to invest the 10–15 years it takes to reach a level of musical excellence and proficiency when, through the musical institutions, they can spend an average of 4 years and be guaranteed employment as a *ragi* in a Gurdwara.

Musical colleges, *taksals*, *vidyals*, and departments at universities have a two to six year program with no requirement of prior musical training. Students come into these programs with a maximum education of up to twelfth class and often times little musical experience. Although consistent and individualized attention would



help these budding musicians achieve a greater level of musical proficiency, they often do not receive it due to the larger class sizes and programmatic constraints of the educational institutions. Unless students are at a *vidyala* solely dedicated to the teaching of Gurbani Kirtan, students often have other subjects in their curriculum to which they have to devote adequate time and attention. With such constraints on dedicated and individual training, students often do not learn the complex intricacies of each *raga*. For example, the intonation of each *sva* (note) is distinct and different per *raga*, as are the ways that the notes are touched upon ascendance or descendance. [12] Because of the high level of attention to detail required to gain a comprehensive grasp on one *raga* form, it is imperative that the student learns how to render multiple *raga* forms to differentiate one from another. Most institutions dedicated to teaching Gurbani Kirtan focus on a curriculum which teaches the 31 *ragas* found in the Guru Granth Sahib. However, to become proficient in the 31 *ragas* requires the knowledge in how to render other *ragas* to ensure that the form of another *raga* is not intruding in the melody. [14] The musical proficiency needed to sing Gurbani Kirtan in *raga* takes much more than the two to six year program afforded most *ragis*. This period is viewed by the *guru-shishya* pedagogy as a nascent time in which a student undergoing this process is not yet taught musical compositions but is only taught how to render the notes of the *ragas* to ensure the words of the Gurbani are not burdened with unskillful discord and are instead enlivened through mellifluous mastery.

The achievement of musical mastery requires a lifetime commitment to learning and dedicated practice. Musical institutions, though lacking in the time and specialized attention afforded by the *guru-shishya* parampara, have the benefit of making education widely available and accessible. Nevertheless, to this day women are unable to study at the *vidyals* and become hired as professional *ragis* but are able to learn Gurbani Kirtan at the Universities and become semi-professional Sikh musicians and music teachers. Thus the musical institutions predominately cater to Sikh males who are given the opportunity to be employed as

*ragis* in a historical Gurdwara in India, in one of the thousands of Gurdwaras worldwide or even as one of 30 *ragi jathas* employed at the Harimandir Sahib. (See *Gurmat Sangeet Praband Te Prasad* by Gurnam Singh for further information on Gurbani Kirtan educational institutions.). [17]

On the whole, *ragis* act as mediators of the Gurus' *bani* whose role it is to enliven the *bani* Guru within the Sikh panth. Debates exist between contemporary and revivalist *ragis* as to whether or not musical aesthetics affects how the mystico-poetic *bani* is experienced. Although musical virtuosity allows for profound aesthetic expression, Sikhs emphasize clarity of pronunciation and deep knowledge of the *bani* over technical proficiency. Primacy of the *bani* therefore is often cited as justification for *ragis* with less extensive musical education. Regardless of perspective, undergoing an educative process directly affects how the Gurbani is conveyed by the *ragis* and imbibed by the *sangat* which in turn shapes the Sikh community through devotion to the *bani* as Guru.

### Summary: Shaping the Modern Ragi

Guru Nanak initiated the singing of Gurbani Kirtan as a communal practice of worship for the Sikh panth. This practice continued under the purview of the Gurus and professional Muslim *rababi* musicians until Guru Arjan bestowed the musical capability in members of the Sikh *sangat* creating the Sikh *kirtaniya* musician. During this time, Gurbani Kirtan was composed in the *dhrupad* and folk genres used in devotional music of the era. The musical artistry which had been part of intimate temple, communal, and personal settings then shifted to the exclusive court audiences. Here music was patronized by trained connoisseurs which ensured it maintained a high level of musical proficiency. However, it was when reformists propagated modern notions of democratic accessibility and religious purity that Indian classical music began to be viewed as elitist and in need of reform. Thus educational institutions were established to create a new class of musicians and educated listeners. Finally the advent of recording technology further expanded the listening audience to an even wider public domain in effect commercializing music as a mass commodity for the diverse

purchasing public as patron. Media technologies such as the gramophone (1890s), radio (1920s), film (1930s), cassettes (1970s), compact discs (1980s), video compact discs (1990s), as well as the Internet and satellite television (2000–on) market a standardized, common-denominator music to a broad pan-regional and diasporic audience. Recorded media therefore has affected the aesthetics of Gurbani Kirtan to appeal to a diverse listening and patronizing sangat audience. In other words, the way in which the Word of the Guru is transmitted by the ragi through the medium of *kirtan* has been subject to changing patronage, pedagogy, and aesthetic preferences, shaping the performative role of the modern Sikh *ragi*.

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurbani Kirtan](#)
- [Guru](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Ragas \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Sikh Musicology](#)

## References

1. Bakhle J (2005) Two men and music: nationalism in the making of an Indian classical tradition. Oxford University Press, Oxford
2. Kanwal BS (2010) Punjab De Prasad Ragi Rababi. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
3. Kaur IN (Spring–Fall 2011) Sikh Shabad Kirtan and Gurmat Sangit. J Punjab Stud 18(1–2):251–278
4. Kaur M (1983) Golden Temple: past and present. Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar
5. Manuel P (1993) Cassette culture. University of Chicago Press, Chicago
6. Mansukhani GS (1982) Indian classical music and Sikh Kirtan. Oxford & IBH Publishing, New Delhi
7. Marcus S (Autumn, 1992–Winter, 1993) Recycling Indian film-songs: popular music as a source of melodies for North Indian folk musicians. Asian Music 24(1):101–110
8. Nabha KS (1930) Mahan Kosh. National Book Shop, New Delhi
9. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
10. Qureshi RB (January 1999) His master's voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia. Popular Music 18(1):63–98
11. Shankar VN, Kaur H (2005) Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, India
12. Sanyal R, Widdess R (2004) Dhrupad: tradition and performance in Indian. Aldershot, Hants
13. Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Delhi (2006) Sikh Rehat Maryada. Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, New Delhi
14. Singh B (2001) Sikh Kirtan Maryada. Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia lecture in Sikhism. Center for South Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley
15. Singh G (2001) Sikh musicology: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Hymns of the human spirit. Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi
16. Singh G (2008) Sikh sacred music: Gurmat Sangeet. Gurmat Prakashan, Patiala
17. Singh G (2000) Gurmat Sangeet Praband Te Pasar. Publications Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala
18. Singh M (trans) (1996) Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar
19. Singh RBG (2008) Kirtan Nirmolak Heera & the art of music. Bhai Gurcharan Singh Ragi 'Kanwal', New Delhi
20. Sikh Sacred Music Society (1967) Sikh sacred music. Sikh Sacred Music Society, New Delhi
21. van der Veer P (2001) Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain. Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford

## Rahit

- [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)
- [Rahit-Namas](#)

## Rahit Maryādā (Code of Conduct), Sikhism

Louis E. Fenech  
Department of History, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

## Synonyms

[Guide \(Sikh\)](#); [Maryada](#); [Rahit](#)

## Definition

The Sikh Guides to Life (Rahit), history, and content.

## Main Text

The Punjabi terms *sikh rahit* may be understood literally as “Sikh living standards,” while the word *maryādā*, though likely from the Sanskrit *marya* (limit) and *ādā* (accept), is a compound with a more fanciful interpretation, namely, *mar* (death) and *yād* (remembrance), suggesting that the practices contained within persuade Sikhs to live ethically by encouraging them to always keep in mind that life on this earth is but a transitory stage which will end in death.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* is thus understood to be at this time the foremost guide to Sikh behavioral, sartorial, and ethical discipline encompassing what Sikhs are meant to believe individually and collectively as well as practices and regulations which standardize the distinctive Sikh way of life, a unique way of life which will ultimately lead to liberation from the trans-migratory cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The implication in such a guide that it represents the Sikh tradition as a single coherent orthodoxy is quite clear despite the fact that the Sikh reality presents a far more diversified picture, complete with many ways of expressing Sikh-ness. The production of and the sustained authority bestowed upon the Sikh Rahit Maryada are factors very intimately tied into the context out of which the text evolved. In many ways this guide is a testament to the attempts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sikh intellectuals and theologians to come to terms with modernity while doing so in a way which remains Sikh. In other words, the Sikh Rahit Maryada is a modern document which draws in part upon older traditions of discipline and interpretation.

Its origins therefore are not within modernity. Indeed, the Sikh Rahit Maryada is today’s principal rahit-nama and sustains a strong tradition of preparing guides to the Sikh life which may be traced back to the hymns of the early Sikh Gurus,

hymns which are found within the foremost Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*, or the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Both texts answer similar questions: while the *Adi Granth* tells us what Sikhs should believe and how they should act, the *rahit-namas* answer the question of who a Sikh is. The *Adi Granth* is the source of Sikh Rahit which is supplemented with numerous other rahit sources such as the *vārān* or odes of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (d. circa 1637), the *hukamnamas* of the Sikh Gurus, the works of Bhai Nand Lal (d. circa 1713), and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *rahit-namas* proper, almost all of the latter of which were apparently prepared by close disciples of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708). The Sikh Rahit Maryada clearly draws upon all of these giving prominence to the *Adi Granth* and supplementing these with the teachings of revered and pious Sikh leaders.

The Sikh Rahit Maryada though differs from the earlier *rahit-namas* in that it is not the product of a single author. It begins, for example, by clearly articulating the nature of the committees which ultimately formulated the document and the many diverse members who were a part of the drafting committee. In all 84 Sikh intellectuals and 21 Sikh institutions are individually noted as having participated in the preparation of the final document in a number of separate meetings over the years 1931–1945, the printing of the final record delayed until 1950 3 years after India’s independence. ([2], pp. 2–7) There is in this prologue of sorts an almost legalistic aspect to the document, which has become representative of the Sikh Rahit Maryada, as it derives its authority from the vast diversity of its board members all made up of pious Sikhs thus suggesting its binding nature. One can here see a similarity between the earlier Sikh *rahit-namas* and the Sikh Rahit Maryada, namely, that while the *rahit-namas* derive authority from Guru Gobind Singh via his close disciples to whom the earlier *rahit-namas* are attributed, the Sikh Rahit Maryada likewise derives its authority from the Guru in the form of the *Guru Panth* as represented by the Sikh intellectuals and institutions noted therein. This is part of the reason why the text of Sikh Rahit Maryada includes a detailed description of the doctrine of *Guru Panth*, the belief that the

eternal Guru or God is mystically present whenever a group of five or more *Amritdhārī* Sikhs gather to deliberate a point of doctrine. Any decision agreed upon in such deliberations bears the stamp of the Guru. ([2], p. 23)

Ultimately, what these board members prepared is an interestingly fluid document which recognizes the existence of one primary Sikh identity but makes space for a wide variety of alternate Sikh identities with the intention that following the discipline within the Sikh Rahit Maryada will inevitably lead the pious Sikh to adopt the Khalsa identity generously defined within the text. A Sikh who is either *Sahajdhārī* (a “slow adopter” as the text defines it) or a *Kesdhārī* (a “hair-bearing” Sikh) will ultimately become *Amritdhārī* or an initiated Khalsa Sikh, what the text terms a *tīār-bar-tīār singh*, a “full-fledged Singh”. ([2], p. 23) Chapter 1, Article 1 which begins the *Sikh dī tārīf* (Definition of a Sikh) is demonstrative of the cautious approach adopted by these Sikh intellectuals, but one which nevertheless confirms the primacy of the Khalsa. To the first three elements of Sikh belief – the Sikh is to believe in the one God (*Akāl Purakh*), the ten Sikh Gurus, and the doctrine of Guru Granth (the scripture as the living Guru) – a fourth appears which is worded rather guardedly. Note, for example, 1:1:5:

*Jo istrī jān purś . . . dasmeś jī de ammrīt utte  
nisachā rakkhdā* ([2], 8)

[A Sikh] is any man or woman *who believes* . . .  
in the [power] of the initiatory elixir (*ammrīt*) [of  
the Khalsa] prepared by the tenth Guru. [emphases  
added]

As Hew McLeod claimed one need not actually imbibe the elixir which is at the center of the Khalsa ritual of initiation (known as *amrit saṅskār*, *khaṇḍe kī pāhul*, or *khaṇḍe dā amrit*) to become a member of the Khalsa, but only believe in the ritual and thus by extension the preeminence of the Khalsa. ([1], p. 179)

The rest of the guide is divided into two distinct but intimately related sections: *śakhsī rahiṇī* or personal conduct and *panthak rahiṇī*, Panthic (i.e., collective Sikh) conduct. Sikh personal duties begin with appeals to the disciplined remembrance (*abhiās*) of the divine name (*nām*),

to live according to the Guru’s teachings, and finally to do the latter through voluntary selfless service or *sevā*. ([2], p. 8) All three of these are then elaborated by noting the specific scriptures to be recited, including the text of the *Ardās* (petition), the prayer of the Khalsa, the general rules of Sikh conduct, and the particular service (often within a *gurdwārā* or Sikh house of worship) which qualifies as selfless. ([2], pp. 8–16)

Within the elaboration of *nām bāṇī dā abhiās*, the Sikh Rahit Maryada first prescribes those hymns and prayers which should be regularly recited, including the Ardas. The Ardas enjoins gathered Sikhs to remember their glorious history and petition for future success. Here there is ample scope for adaption, as a note within the Sikh Rahit Maryada claims, which allows individual sangats to modify portions of the text of the prayer to specific occasions and purposes. The first portion also delineates the practices to be followed within gurdwaras; the congregational singing of hymns (*kīrtan*); the taking of an order or *hukam* from the Adi Granth; the process of both *sadhārān* and *akhaṇḍ pāṭhs* – ordinary and unbroken readings of the Guru Granth Sahib, respectively; the beginning (*arambh*) and conclusion (*bhog*) of unbroken readings which last 48 h; the preparation and consumption of *kaṛāh prasad* (a sacramental food prepared within an iron vessel known as a *kaṛāh*) whose aim is to underscore the casteless emphasis within Sikh doctrine; and, finally, a description of Sikh literature (*bāṇī*, literally, “sacred utterance”) which may be sung as *kīrtan* and used for the purpose of the homily (*kathā*). This last section is surprisingly not clearly defined and leaves much room for interpretation particularly in regard to the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Gurdas, and Bhai Nand Lal. Which of the many works of these authors is in fact regarded as *bāṇī* seems left for individual congregations or *saṅgats* to determine.

Following these explanations one finds a discussion of *gurmatī dī rahiṇī* or living according to the precepts of Gurmat (Sikhism) which includes general rules of conduct (the worship of one God, acceptance of the ten Gurus, the acknowledgment that all the Sikh Gurus manifest the same spirit, rejection of caste, among others); a description of

various Sikh ceremonies the most important of which regard life cycle rituals; and a description of selfless service performed within a gurdwara.

It is within *panthic dī rahīnī* that one comes across the first reference to the adoption of a specific Khalsa *bāṇā* (dress) to accompany that of *bāṇī* (sacred utterance). This particular Khalsa *bāṇā* appears in the ritual of initiation into the Khalsa ([2], pp. 24–27) and includes the famous Five Ks all so named as these begin with the Punjabi letter k (*kes* or unshorn hair; *kaṅgha*, the comb; *kaṛā*, the bangle; *kirpān*, the short symbolic dagger; and the *kacchahirā*, breeches extending below the knee). There is in this insistence an emphasis on outward virtue which is equally matched by that on inner purity to which end one finds injunctions against smoking tobacco, the eating of *kuṭṭhā* meat (from an animal killed in the Muslim *ḥalāl* fashion), adultery, and *kesān dī be-adab* “dishonoring the sacred *kes*.” The purity of the individual completed, the text then turns to collective purity by describing those Sikhs worthy of chastisement and the administration of penances (*tankhāhīe*) to offenders who are known as *patit* or “fallen” Sikhs. The former includes those Sikhs who associate with the *pañj mel* or “five reprobate groups,” the first four of which are understood to be historical adversaries of the Sikh Gurus. These are the minas, masands, Dhirmalias, Ramraiyas, and any other “enemies” of the Panth. ([2], p. 27) Of course this last description could easily encompass any group deemed to harbor an enmity towards the collective Sikh Panth. Within recent memory, for example, the Sant Nirankaris have been allocated this status. The ultimate section of the Sikh Rahit Maryada provides Sikhs to appeal a sangat’s decision by petitioning the highest Sikh religious body, the Akal Takht. The penultimate statement details the process of adopting a *gurmattā*, or “the Guru’s decree” which should be binding on all Sikhs.

## Cross-References

- [Amritdhari](#)
- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Chief Khalsa Diwan](#)
- [Gurbani Kirtan](#)

- [Khalsa](#)
- [Marriage \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. McLeod WH (2003) Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
2. Sikkh Rahit Maryādā (1995) Dharam Prachar committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee, Amritsar

## Rahit-Namas

Louis E. Fenech

Department of History, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

## Synonyms

[Guide](#); [Rahit](#)

## Definition

The Sikh Guides to Life (Rahit) and their history.

## Main Text

The Punjabi term *rahit-nama* (literally, “the Book of Living Standards”) refers to a set of guidelines enunciating the Sikh discipline, the Rahit, the earliest example of which one can trace to the beginnings of the eighteenth century. These texts are often claimed to be Sikh in nature, but it is quite clear that these works deal specifically not with the many Sikh traditions and identities which existed within the eighteenth century, but rather with the small number of Sikh traditions which claimed to be Khalsa, the conspicuous martial order of Sikhs promulgated by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 C.E. which is set apart by the commitment of its members to



a rigid spiritual, behavioral, martial, and sartorial standard. What gives these instructions a near sacrosanct status is the belief that they contain, in many instances, the last Sikh Master's parting words of direction to his collective Sikhs before his death in 1708 as communicated through the persons of his very close disciples. As the living Guru was, and continues to be, the source of authority in Sikh tradition, the belief that these instructions were issued by him suggests that the standards noted in these were to be normative.

The problems with such a claim to normativity in the eighteenth century are many. On the one hand many of the eighteenth-century rahit-namas lack consistency among themselves, at times contradicting each other's statements; and on the other certain rahit-namas violate the core principles which permeate the Sikh canon: particular rahit-namas, for example, clearly advocate the observance of caste status which is ridiculed throughout the Sikh scripture as well as manifest a vehement antipathy towards Muslims within a religious tradition which adamantly maintains that all humanity is one, united in its dedication to a single, supreme divinity. These are facts which ultimately led Sikh intellectuals of the late nineteenth century who were partly weaned on the values of the European Enlightenment to focus their attention and reforming zeal upon the Sikh rahit-namas in the hope that they could expunge material from them which they deemed both non-Sikh and offensive, and in the process of so doing ultimately provide a single standard text which all Sikhs could follow, a text which would bring together the more ethical principles of the earlier, eighteenth-century rahit-namas in consonance with the teachings of the *Adi Granth*. It was inevitable that such a "modern" text would strongly imply the existence of one dominant Sikh identity that of the Khalsa as understood by such early twentieth-century intellectuals and allocate all other ways of expressing Sikh-ness to the margins of the Sikh world. The result of their decadelong efforts is the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* which was formally recognized as authoritative in 1950 and continues to be used and debated today underscoring the dynamic nature of Sikh identity. Certainly space was made for these

"less normative" Sikh identities, but despite claims that the Sikh Rahit Maryada represents "the collective personality of the Panth," it nevertheless stresses the primary position of the Khalsa identity. There are of course other ways of expressing Sikh-ness which adhere to other guides – the Namdhari Sikhs, for example, have a separate rahit-nama as too do members of the more "mainline" *Akhand Kirtani Jatha* – but it is nevertheless the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* which garners the lion's share of attention in most texts on World Religions and Sikhism. It is put simply the dominant rahit-nama of today.

Although it is quite clear that most of the eighteenth-century rahit-namas were written to ultimately demarcate the Khalsa from among other *panths*, both Sikh and non-Sikh, the history of the Sikh Rahit itself begins well before the first formal appearance of these guides. There are, for example, numerous statements regarding proper Sikh behavior and practice within the principal Sikh scripture the *Adi Granth* (and too the more controversial Sikh scripture, the *Dasam Granth*) as well as within the odes or *varan* written by the foremost Sikh theologian of the seventeenth century, Bhai Gurdas Bhalla. Indeed, just about any pre-nineteenth-century Sikh material can be excavated for injunctions regarding proper Sikh behavior and practice. These would include particular seventeenth-century *pothis* and *granth*s, as well as the *Janamsakhi*, *gur-bilas*, *gur-bansavali*, and *gur-pranali* literature. But it is nevertheless the *Adi Granth* which here reigns supreme. In one *Adi Granth* passage, for example, Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Master, lays down a set of actions which are clearly incumbent upon the true believer many of which will be effortlessly incorporated into the later rahit-namas. Here it is said that a true Sikh rises at dawn, takes his or her bath, and meditates upon the *nam*, the divine self-expression of *Akal Purakh* which surrounds and penetrates the universe (Guru Ram Das, *Gaurī kī vār* 11, *Adi Granth*, 305–306). Such instructions along with many others within the hymns of those Gurus and saints whose compositions are within the *Adi Granth* are regularly repeated within the scripture and as such may be assumed to provide the standard behavior and

discipline which was to be ideally followed by the early Sikh Panth. Humility, honesty, integrity, charity, purity, selfless service, and a keen awareness of the divine through *nam simran*, disciplined meditation on the *nam*, become the features of the ideal Sikh community of the first Gurus.

In this regard one may cite Bhai Gurdas Bhalla, a nephew of Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, who articulates a Sikh way of life in his famous *varan* and his less-famous *kabbits*. Drawing upon the general discipline enjoined upon the Sikh within the Adi Granth Bhai Gurdas' contribution in regard to Sikh discipline lay not so much on innovation or augmentation, but rather on emphasis. In his works, for example, there is an intriguing engagement with the concept of the *gur-mukh*, the one who (literally) "faces the Guru" (*Var* 9:3) ([18], p. 143) and one also discovers a particular stress on the joy inherent in the company of the faithful, the *sangat* or *satsang* in which the pious Sikh can find liberation from the cycle of existence. The first *pauri* of *var* 9 articulates this quite lucidly:

*Pārbrahmu gur śabadu hai satsaṅgi nivāsī/sādh  
saṅgati sachu khaṇḍu hai bhāu bhagati abhiāsī  
(Var 9:1:2–3) ([18], 141)*

The eternal Word of the Guru is the highest Brahman which resides within the congregation of the faithful. This holy company is the Realm of Truth where the opportunity for focussed devotion is manifest

The Realm of Truth (*Sach Khaṇḍu*) of which the good Bhai ji speaks is a reference to the highest spiritual state of liberation the truly pious and disciplined Sikh can attain, which is described in Guru Nanak's famous prayer with which the Adi Granth begins, *Japji* (Guru Nanak, *Japji* 36, Adi Granth, p. 8).

Such emphasis on the company of the faithful will eventually crystallize into the doctrine of Guru Panth, namely, the belief in the eternal Guru's mystical presence within a congregation of pious, devoted Sikhs. Before this, however, such a prominence is indirectly noted within another early source of the Rahit, the pithy "written instructions" (*hukam-name*) of the Sikh Gurus. First prepared perhaps during the time of the second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad, many of these

brief missives begin by naming the congregation's general location (the *sangat* of Patna, for instance) followed by the inclusion of the names of its (one assumes) most prominent members. The *hukamnamas* are not generally understood as scriptural although the fact that these were written by the Guru or a scribe in his entourage makes them objects worthy of reverence. These orders clearly attest to their general seventeenth- and eighteenth-century context in which far flung *sangats* of the Sikh Gurus could not regularly obtain the *darsan* or sanctified sight of their spiritual master. Often these missives were sent to reassure the *sangat* of their Guru's concern for them or to inform its members of the Guru's impending arrival and to request goods and cash donations for the Guru's journeys. Apart from these appeals, however, the "instructions" in the *hukamnamas* tend to be of a very general nature indeed and contain requests for the *sangat* to regularly repeat the word *Gurū* or God and the proscription of meat and fish eating. In these one does not encounter the sustained moral emphases within the Adi Granth or the *Varan*. It is only during Guru Gobind Singh's *guruship* (1675–1708) that the *hukamnamas* will include requests of a variety that scholars generally associate with the later *rahit-namas*. The injunctions to avoid dealings with the *masands*, the representatives of the Gurus to distant congregations, emissaries of a sort who, over time, had become corrupt and to present oneself with weapons girded ([11], p. 179) suggesting the more tumultuous period of the late eighteenth century. It is in these commands that one may see the earliest tentative examples of what would become the famous Five Ks, the five items which all Khalsa Sikhs will be asked to don in the *rahit* texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all so named as these begin with the Punjabi letter k (*kes* or unshorn hair; *kaṅgha*, the comb; *kara*, the bangle; *kirpan*, the short symbolic dagger; and the *kacchahira*, breeches extending below the knee).

The tenth Guru's *hukamnamas* were written both before and after the creation of the Khalsa. Indeed, one can tentatively date the foundation of the order from the use of the word Khalsa in these

commands (it is absent in the earliest). This also marks the time of the first rahit-namas. General Sikh tradition claims that among the first of these texts are ones prepared by Guru Gobind Singh's foremost poet and disciple Bhai Nand Lal Goya. Bhai Nand Lal is a fascinating figure who is known predominantly for his beautiful Persian poetry written in the *ghazal* or *masnavi* format generally associated with the mystics and the mystical dimension of Islam, Sufis and Sufism, respectively. So glowing is Nand Lal's praise of the Sikh Gurus in his Persian works that the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* accords his poetry a status on par with the compositions of Bhai Gurdas, below that of the *Adi Granth* alone, a *banī* which is worthy of singing as *kirtan* within a congregational setting. From this Persian poetry however little insofar as rahit is concerned may be extracted apart from general ethical and moral behaviors which Sikhs and Sufis have in common such as purifying the heart through repetition of the many names of God (Pbi: *simran*; Per: *zikr*). ([1], pp. 49–55) It is rather to the Punjabi and Brajbhasha works attributed to Nand Lal that one must look. These relatively well-known texts are usually understood as rahit-namas proper although the first, the *Prasan-uttar* (Question and Answer, sometimes referred to as the *Rahit-nama Bhai Nand Lal ji*) is more in the form of a catechism. To this one may add the *Sakhi Rahit ki* (Evidence of the Rahit) and the *Tankhahnama* (Manual of Penance, whose earliest recension is titled the *Nasihah-nama*, Instruction Manual, a manuscript copy of which is dated to 1718–1719). While the *Prasan-uttar* and the *Tankhahnama* are in poetry, the *Sakhi Rahit ki* is in prose. The other disciples of Guru Gobind Singh who are credited with having authored a rahit-nama include Prahilad Rai, a Brahman who became a Sikh through direct contact with the tenth Master and took up residence in his court; Daya Singh, easily the foremost of the Five Beloved (*Panj Pyare*: the first five Sikh to be initiated into the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh) who carried the tenth Guru's Persian epistle, the *Zafarnamah*, to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb; and Chaupa Singh Chhibber, the *khidava* or adult minder of the tenth Guru while

he was still a minor. To these one may add Desa Singh, who although not a direct disciple of the Guru was an elderly Sikh of the eighteenth century (perhaps an associate of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia) who had evidently had a vision in which Guru Gobind Singh instructed him to prepare a rahit-nama in which Nand Lal and the Guru discussed Sikh morals and comportment.

As one can well note the common facet of their eighteenth-century rahit-namas is that the texts are generally associated with these close disciples of Guru Gobind Singh. Careful scrutiny of the texts of each however demonstrates how unlikely these associations are. As it is in prose the *Sakhi Rahit ki* of Nand Lal, for example, seems the least likely to have been written by a poet. The pedestrian nature of the Punjabi poetry in which the other two Nand Lal rahit-namas are written, moreover, makes it quite unlikely that these could have been produced by a poet of Nand Lal's caliber. The fact that Nand Lal did not choose to become initiated into the Khalsa, moreover, seriously calls into question his authorship of the *Tankhahnama* and *Sakhi Rahit ki* in which the Khalsa as the ideal Sikh identity is described at length. Daya Singh's rahit-nama furthermore is clearly a late eighteenth-century product and suggests that associating this text with this famed member of the Panj Pyare was an attempt to grant the rahit-nama an aura of authority and legitimacy which was desperately needed during the tenuous period in which these texts were brought to light, a time in which Sikh sardars were constrained much more by the contingencies of *realpolitik* than the moral guidelines apparently laid down by the last Guru. Certainly these texts did provide some restraint on the part of sardars such as Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Alha Singh, but these injunctions were just as likely violated as often as they were observed.

It is possible that at least some of these were produced within the Guru's court however. Of the three Nand Lal rahit-namas, the *Prasan-uttar* makes no mention whatsoever of the Khalsa indicating that it is the earliest of these a tentative conclusion supported by the date of its completion which one discovers in its twenty-second verse:

*sammat satrah sahas su bāvan* (s. 1752) or 1695 C.E.. ([9], p. 55) As the title suggests the format is of a didactic nature in which Nand Lal questions the Guru who immediately responds with the rules of conduct to which every pious *gur-mukh* should aspire. Rising early in the morning one is asked to recite Guru Nanak's *Japji* and Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap*, to go to take *darsan* of the Guru within the sangat, and listen to the Guru's *banī* or sacred utterance as expounded within the scripture. Nand Lal then queries the Guru in regard to how one may take just such *darsan* to which the Guru explains that he possesses a threefold form: a transcendent form (*nirgun*) and a form with qualities (*sagun*) which may be perceived via human faculties through the final form, that of the Guru's Word (*gur-sabad*). ([9], p. 55) While the first finds expression within Sainapati's early *gur-bilas* text, *Sri Gur Sobha*, it is the *gur-sabad* which paves the way for the scripture's status as the living Guru of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib or as some Sikhs claim the eleventh Nanak. It should be noted that although the standard copy of the *Prasan-uttar* labels these as the Guru's principal sights/sites, there are many manuscript copies of the text which include among these other forms in which the Guru mystically appears the court or *darbar* of the Guru. ([2], pp. 204–205])

The exceptional martial emphasis within both the *Tankhahnama* and the *Sakhi Rahit ki* allows us to clearly situate them within the early to mid-eighteenth century. While they both speak of duties, doctrine, dress, rituals, food, and moral observances, both texts also emphasize the need to engage in righteous warfare and the use and possession of weapons (although it should be noted that there is no specific reference to the Five Ks in these works) and the respect that the Khalsa must demonstrate towards them, all reminiscent of themes one finds in Dasam Granth compositions such as the *Shastar Nam Mala* or the Garland of Weapons' Names and contemporary *gur-bilas* literature. The bearing these texts manifest towards Muslims, for example, is also quite representative of early to mid-eighteenth-century Khalsa attitudes. The *Tankhahnama* claims, for example, that

He is a Khalsa who slays Muslims. ([6], 284)

While the *Sakhi Rahit ki* states that a Sikh of the Guru is one who does not believe *mien di mat* or the 'teaching of Muslims.' ([9], 60)

Indeed, such claims may be added to a number of other *rahit-namas* which indicate an eighteenth-century date such as that attributed to Chhibbar. The context in which texts like Chaupa Singh (whose *rahit-nama* is the lengthiest and most detailed of the eighteenth-century lot) were produced, a tumultuous period of Sikh history beginning with the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 until the commencement of the Sikh kingdom centered at Lahore in the very early nineteenth century in which armed bands of peasants and disbanded soldiers often roamed the countryside was quite determinative in their description or prescription of an ideal Khalsa Sikh identity. It is quite likely that these early *rahit-namas* attempted to mold out of just such an armed peasantry an ideal spiritual warrior band which could stand alongside other predominantly "martial clans" such as the Pathan, Afghan, and Rohilla warrior bands of northern India. It is in this light that one should read the Prahilad Rai *rahit-nama*'s pronouncements about unity among Khalsa Sikhs (verse 29):

*lainā denā khālse, ān dev sabh jhūth* ([9], 67)

Have dealings with the Khalsa alone; it is false to venerate the gods of others

And, as well, those statements of the Desa Singh *rahit-nama*:

*Āp singh jo rājā hoī/nirdhān singhan pālai sōī/  
Nirdhān khālse nehu lagāvai/dhan bāzī de prīti  
baḍhāvai/pardesī singhan jab dekhai/in kī sevā  
karai bisekhai.* ([9], 149)

The Singh who is a ruler should care for poor Singhs. This raja [should] show feel concern towards the poor Khalsa. Give the Khalsa money or a horse for thus his attachment will become stronger. When he sees a Singh from elsewhere let him give them special treatment

Such concerns are also echoed throughout Chaupa Singh although the latter's understanding of the Sikh is expanded beyond the Khalsa to include non-Khalsa Sikhs indicating the later date of this work's completion (1740s–1765 C.E.). [5] Within Chaupa Singh's *rahit-nama* one

may also note the presence of a variety of Sikhs a number of whom he considered nefarious. These apparently were Sikhs in name only.

Although here one discovers clear evidence of disagreement on many points within the eighteenth-century rahit-namas, it appears that on one idea the rahit-namas are uniformly agreed and this regards the unity of the many Sikh groups who considered themselves to be a part of the Khalsa. All these texts share a vision of the Khalsa's future in which the Khalsa stands unified and supreme, as the principal sovereign not just of India, but of the world. And to this end the rahit-namas proffer a number of prophecies, the most popular of which is repeated in many forms throughout eighteenth-century Sikh literature and has as its most common refrain a couplet which is first discovered within the *Tankhahnama* of Nand Lal:

*Rāj karegā khālsā ākī rahahi na koi/khvār hoi sabh milāinge bachahi sārān jo hoi* ([9], 59)

The Khalsa will rule and no traitor shall remain/  
all those who suffer hardship shall find refuge in the  
Guru's protection

With the beginning of the nineteenth century and the foundation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh kingdom of Lahore, the production of rahit-namas endured. Although the Khalsa continued to be the principal Sikh identity (e.g., as evinced by the Maharaja's proclamation that his government was to be known as *Sarkar Khalsa Ji*, the Khalsa's Government), it was quite clear to Sikh rulers and others that this was merely one among a series of Sikh identities. Indeed, the Maharaja himself visibly patronized those Sikhs who espoused an Udasi or Nirmala Sikh character. Among the few rahit-namas which appeared in this era are two which are a part of the apocryphal *Gur Ratan Mal* also known as the *Sakhian* (The One Hundred Testimonies) and the *Prem Sumarg* or The Supreme Path of Love, both texts of which claim to have been prepared by the tenth Guru. While Chaupa Singh and the two *Gur Ratan Mal* rahit texts recognize the existence of non-Khalsa Sikhs, the *Prem Sumarg* is a rahit which actually caters to this crowd. There is one should add some controversy surrounding the text. There are Sikh scholars who contend that this is not a nineteenth,

but rather an early eighteenth-century text as it highlights a Sikh identity before the hegemony of the early Khalsa. ([7], pp. 3–9) But the fact that the earliest Sikh literature after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, particularly *Sri Gur Sobha*, allocates a very special space to the Khalsa alone makes this claim questionable.

Another non-Khalsa rahit-nama which claims to belong to the early eighteenth-century, conveying the very pronouncements of Guru Gobind Singh himself, is a rahit-nama interestingly titled in Arabic, the *Wajibu'laraz* or Reasonable Request. The focus on non-Khalsa Sikh weddings in both the *Prem Sumarg* and the *Wajibu'laraz* suggests the more settled times of the mid-nineteenth century immediately prior to the foundation of the first Sikh "reform" movement the Singh Sabha (est. 1873).

It is under the loving hands of Singh Sabha intellectuals that the rahit finds its final form. In certain ways the rahit which was ultimately promulgated recognizes the conflicted nature of the Singh Sabhas. Generally Sikh tradition paints a homogeneous picture of these organizations, but in fact Singh Sabhas throughout the Punjab were very diverse although hovering around two principal ways of expressing Sikh-ness. One was the Sanatan or traditional interpretation which reveled in the diverse variety of Sikh identities of the nineteenth century, while the other expressed a Tat Khalsa (Pure Khalsa) understanding of the tradition which looked with suspicion upon any suggestion of plurality within the Sikh world.

Among the many ideologues who articulated the diverse ideas of the Sanatan Sikhs as they came to be called was Avtar Singh Vahiria a close disciple of Baba Khem Singh Bedi who claimed direct descent from Guru Nanak. Matching Vahiria idea for idea was the prolific Kahn Singh of Nabha, author of the famous *Gur Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, whose ideas provided the core of Tat Khalsa Sikh tradition. Insofar as the Rahit and rahit-namas were concerned, both men produced works to this end, Avtar Singh's *Khalsa Dharam Sastra* and Kahn Singh's *Gurmat Sudhakar* and *Gurmat Prabhakar* (as well as his posthumous *Gurmat Martand*) not to mention perhaps his most famous work, of 1898, *Ham Hindū Nāhīn*, We Are Not Hindus. Although Vahiria was a Khalsa Sikh in



appearance (as was Khem Singh Bedi), his *Khalsa Dharam Sastra* nevertheless relegates the Khalsa to only one among a series of Khalsa identities. For Kahn Singh, however, this would simply not do. The Khalsa in his works was lauded as the principal Sikh identity, and a number of early Sikh sources were utilized in all of his works, particularly *Gurmat Sudhakar* and *Gurmat Prabhakar* to make what he understood as this well-established fact plainly clear. It would be the work of Kahn Singh that would ultimately inspire the first of the modern, twentieth-century rahit-namas. The *Gurmat Prakas Bhag Sanskar* which was in many ways the forerunner to the ultimate testament of the Sikh Rahit, the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. Certainly underscoring the dominance of the Khalsa Panth, the *Gurmat Prakas Bhag Sanskar* and later the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* nevertheless recognized and made room for other non-Khalsa Sikh traditions, the latter particularly as stepping stones if one will towards full commitment to the Sikh faith. Such an understanding is implied, for example, in the very interesting gloss given to the term *Sahajdhari* Sikh, that is the “slow adopter” Sikh [of the Khalsa tradition]. One rahit which took exception to these attempts at inclusion and took the claim of Khalsa exclusivity to heights hitherto unscaled was that produced by the Panch Khalsa Diwan led by that most passionate of Khalsa Sikhs Teja Singh of Bhasaur. For Teja Singh only Khalsa Sikhs who had been administered the elixir of the double-edged sword (*khaṇḍe ki pahul*) had the right to call themselves Khalsa; indeed only these people were Sikh. Teja Singh, moreover, was also quite scrupulous in regulating female discipline: in the Panch Khalsa Diwan, women also had to sport turbans. Certainly such claims inspired many later Sikh movements such as the Akhand Kirtani Jatha of Bhai Randhir Singh (1878–1961) of Narangwal (in Ludhiana district), a group which, as mentioned earlier, observe their own rahit in a text known as the *Rahit Bibek* which is the second part of *Gurmat Bibek*. ([17], pp. 95–260)

Certainly the existence of such texts demonstrates that despite the regular, widespread use of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* and its recognition of authority by most Sikhs, there are many Sikhs, both Khalsa and non-Khalsa, who observe

standards noted in other contemporary rahit-namas. These would include the Namdhari, Nirankari, and Nihang Sikh rahit-namas; rahit-namas articulating the discipline to be followed by members of the Nanaksar tradition and the aforementioned Akhand Kirtani Jatha tradition; the Khalsa rahit which appears as the *Gurmat Rahit Maryada* of the Damdami Taksal which was led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale until his death in 1984; and the rahit prescribed in the circles of the Khalsa Dharma in the Western Hemisphere tradition generally known as the 3HO organization (Happy, Healthy, and Holy). Such a plethora of rahit-namas and the various Sikh traditions of which these are a part very much attest to the vibrant diversity of Sikhisms throughout the world.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Akhand Path](#)
- ▶ [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai](#)
- ▶ [Gurmukh](#)
- ▶ [Janamsakhis](#)
- ▶ [Japji](#)
- ▶ [Khalsa](#)
- ▶ [Misl\(s\)](#)
- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- ▶ [Rahit Maryādā \(Code of Conduct\), Sikhism](#)
- ▶ [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Fenech LE (1994) Persian Sikh scripture: The Ghazals of Bhai Nand Lal Goya. *Int J Punjab Stud* 1:49–70
2. Fenech LE (2008) *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: the court of God in the world of men*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
3. Fenech LE (1915) *Gurmat Prakāś Bhāg Saṁskār arthāt Gur-maryādā* Karan dī Vidhī. Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar
4. Khalsa GS (1986) *Gurmati Rahit Maryādā*. Khalsa Brothers, Amritsar
5. McLeod WH (1987) *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*. University of Otago Press, Dunedin
6. McLeod WH (2003) *Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi

7. McLeod WH (2006) *Prem Sumārag: testimony of a Sanatan Sikh*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
8. Nair GS (1985) *Gur Ratan Māl arthāt Sau Sākhīān*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala
9. Padam PS (1991) *Rahitnāme*. Bhai Chatar Singh Jivan Singh, Amritsar
10. Padam PS (1995) *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar
11. Singh G (1985) *Hukamnāme: Gurū Sāhibān, Mātā Sāhibān, Bandā Singh ate Khālsā jī de*. Panjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala
12. Singh K (1960) *Gur-śabad Ratanākar Mahān Koś*. Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala
13. Singh K (1978) *Ham Hindū Nahīn*. Kendari Sri Guru Singh Sabha Shatabadi. Kamati, Amritsar
14. Singh K (1970) *Gurmat Prabhākar*. Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala
15. Singh K (1970) *Gurmat Sudhākar*. Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala
16. Singh O (1993) *Kabitt Savaiye Bhāi Gurdās: Anukramṇikā te Koś*. Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala
17. Singh R (1975) *Gurmat Bibek*. Bhai Randhir Singh Publishing House, Ludhiana
18. Singh V (1997) *Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib jī dī Kuñjī: Vārān Bhāi Gurdās Saṭk Bhāv Prakāśanī Ṭikā Samet Mukammāl*. Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi
19. Vahiria AS (1894) *Khālsā Dharam Śastr*. Arorabans Press, Lahore

## Raidas

► [Ravidas \(Raidas\)](#)

## Ramdas (Guru)

Hardip Singh Syan  
SOAS, University of London,  
Russell Square, London, UK

## Synonyms

[Religious leader](#); [Saint](#); [Savant](#)

## Definition

**Ram Das, Guru (1534–1581)**, was the fourth Guru in Guru Nanak's spiritual genealogy. Guru

Ram Das was Guru Amar Das's immediate successor and Guru Arjan's immediate predecessor. Guru Ram Das reigned as Guru for 7 years from 1574 to 1581.

## Guru Ram Das

**Biographical Sources** The sources for Guru Ram Das's life come largely from the eighteenth century onwards. Important seventeenth century primary sources include the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Bhai Gurdas Bhalla's ballads (*varan*), and Harji Sodhi's *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* (the Discourses of Miharvan). The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* contains Guru Ram Das's own hymns. [1] Bhai Gurdas Bhalla in his ballads wrote several compositions about Guru Ram Das's majesty. [4] Harji Sodhi was Guru Ram Das's great-grandson, and in Harji's biography of his father, Miharvan, he briefly discusses Guru Ram Das's relationship with Miharvan. [5] These seventeenth century sources shed little light on Guru Ram Das's life before Guruship and offer brief glimpses on his reign as Guru.

In the post-1700 period, there are several sources that discuss Guru Ram Das's life and times with depth, but these sources do not always agree on important details. Significant sources include *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (1769) by Kesar Singh Chhibbar, [3] *Mahima Prakash* (1776) by Sarup Das Bhalla, [2] *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843) by Santokh Singh, [9] and *Panth Prakash* (1880) by Giani Gian Singh. [7]

**Genealogy and Early Life** Gurdial Sodhi was Guru Ram Das's grandfather. Gurdial was a Sodhi Khatri who lived in Lahore and was married to Mata Karmo. ([3], p. 69) There is no information on Gurdial's occupation; it is reasonable to assume given his Khatri background he was a petty trader or employee working in Lahore's markets. The Sodhi clan (*gotra*) was a relatively low-ranking Khatri clan group in the medieval Khatri kinship system. ([6], pp. 501–526) In the *Bachittar Natak* (Wonderful Drama), a chapter in the *Dasam Granth*, Guru Gobind Singh states that the Sodhis were members of the solar dynasty (*suraj bans*) and their lineal ancestor was the

great king, Sodhi Rai. ([8], pp. 65–71) In Gurdial's home, two sons were born: the elder, Hardas (b.1495?), and the younger, Thakurdas (b.1514?). ([3], p. 69)

Hardas married Mata Anup, also known as Mata Daya Kaur, of Basarke, a small village near Goindwal. Basarke coincidentally was Guru Amar Das's ancestral village. Hardas's oldest son was Ram Das (lit. slave of Ram) who was born on 24 September 1534 in Chuna Mandi in Lahore. Ram Das was the firstborn and he was affectionately known as *Jetha* (lit. firstborn). According to Kesar Singh Chhibbar's account, Ram Das had two younger siblings: a brother, Hardial, and a sister, Bibi Ramdasi. ([3], p. 69) However, other sources have stated that Ram Das was an only child.

The circumstances of Guru Ram Das's childhood are unclear with respect to the condition of his parents. According to Kesar Singh Chhibbar's account, Guru Ram Das's father, Hardas, was alive up to the point of his marriage. ([3], p. 69) If this was the case, then Guru Ram Das spent his childhood in Lahore. Other sources suggest that Guru Ram Das's parents died when he was 7 years old, and he went to live with his maternal grandparents in Basarke. ([7], p. 100) All sources are certain that Guru Ram Das married in Basarke.

Ram Das was self-employed as a petty trader selling cooked beans (*ghungani*) in the marketplace. ([7], p. 100) This suggests that Hardas or Ram Das's maternal grandparents were relatively poor traders.

Ram Das married Guru Amar Das's daughter, Bibi Bhani, in Basarke village on 18 February 1554. Ram Das was either staying in Basarke or Goindwal. According to Kesar Singh Chhibbar's account, Ram Das and his father had travelled to Goindwal where Ram Das was chosen as Bibi Bhani's husband. ([3], p. 69) Hardas arranged the marriage with Guru Amar Das. By contrast, the other sources argue that Guru Ram Das was already living in Basarke with his maternal grandparents or he travelled to Goindwal and that is how he caught the attention of Guru Amar Das. ([7], p. 100) Assumedly, Ram Das's maternal grandparents then arranged the marriage with Guru Amar Das. If Kesar Singh Chhibbar's

account is to be believed, then shortly after, Hardas probably passed away.

**Early Adulthood and Family Life** Following Ram Das's marriage, he and his wife decided to stay near Goindwal rather than returning to Lahore. Ram Das became Guru Amar Das's sincerest votary and the most distinguished member of his court. It is claimed that Ram Das was dispatched by Guru Amar Das as an envoy to meet the Mughal Emperor Akbar in Lahore. ([3], p. 70)

During this period of spiritual apprenticeship, Ram Das had three sons. His eldest son, Prithi Chand, was born in 1558. According to Kesar Singh Chhibbar, Prithi Chand was born in Lahore, but other sources say in Goindwal. ([3], p. 69) In 1560, his second son, Mahadev, was born in Goindwal. In 1563, his youngest son, Arjan Dev, was born in Goindwal.

Prithi Chand would distinguish himself as an accomplished and energetic administrator. Mahadev would become an ascetic and reject the householder lifestyle. Arjan Dev, on the other hand, would inherit the Sikh Guruship from his father.

Guru Ram Das only witnessed the birth of one grandchild in 1581, Manohar Das, better known as Miharvan. Miharvan was Prithi Chand's son and he would develop into a luminary amongst medieval Sikh and Punjabi litterateurs. According to Harji Sodhi, Guru Ram Das named his eldest grandson Manohar (attractive) because all who read Miharvan's works would be attracted to his beauty. ([5], p. 174) In 1595, Guru Ram Das's second grandson, Guru Hargobind, was born to Guru Arjan.

**Guruship:** On 1 September 1574, Guru Amar Das passed away and bequeathed his Guruship to Guru Ram Das. Guru Amar Das had advised Guru Ram Das to establish a new town in the Lahore Province of the Mughal Empire. Guru Amar Das also told Guru Ram Das that from this point on the Guruship would remain in the Sodhi household.

Guru Ram Das and his family moved to the new town where he would create his headquarters. This new town was initially known as *Chak Guru Ka* (the Guru's village). But Guru Ram Das expanded this village into a fledgling city. At the center of this city was his sacred tank which came to be known as

*Ram Das Sar* (tank of Ram Das) and then *Amar Sar* (tank of immortality). The village itself developed into a thriving temple town called *Ramdaspur* (city of Ram Das) and later Amritsar. By the close of his reign, Ramdaspur had a growing marketplace and population. Amritsar would develop into the most important pilgrimage and political center in the Sikh world.

Guru Ram Das continued the practice of composing devotional hymns and wrote 638 hymns in 30 different musical measures (*ragas*). All his hymns can be found in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

Towards the end of his Guruship, he appointed his youngest son, Guru Arjan, as his successor. Prithi Chand had been disappointed by the fact he had been overlooked for Guruship, but he accepted Guru Ram Das's decision.

After establishing the foundations of Amritsar and securing the future of his spiritual and family lineage, Guru Ram Das returned to Goindwal for a short stay. He passed away on 1 September 1581 in Goindwal.

## Cross-References

- [Amar Das \(Guru\)](#)
- [Amritsar](#)
- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai](#)
- [Guru](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Historical Sources \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Janamsakhis](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Scripture \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Adi Granth (n.d.) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Bhai Javahar Singh Kirpal Singh, Amritsar
2. Bhalla SD (1971) *Mahima* Prakash. Language Department, Punjab/Patiala
3. Chhibbar KS (1995) Bhai Kesar Singh Chhibbar krit *Bansavalinama Dasa Patashahia Ka* (ed) Piara Singh Padam. Singh Brothers, Amritsar

4. Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai (2005) *Varan Bhai Gurdas* (eds: Hazara Singh, Vir Singh). Bhai Vir Singh, Sahit Sadan, New Delhi
5. Harji Sodhi (1974) *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* (ed: Govindnath Rajguru). Panjab University, Publication Bureau, Chandigarh
6. Rose HA (1990) *A glossary of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and north-west frontier province*, vol 2. Language Department Punjab, Patiala
7. Singh GG (1987) *Panth Prakash*. Language Department, Punjab, Patiala
8. Singh GG (1999) *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib: text and translation*, vol 2 (eds and trans: Jodh Singh, Dharam Singh). Heritage Publications, Patiala
9. Singh S (1961–1964) *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granthvali* (ed: Vir Singh) *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar

## Rasa

- [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Ratiocination

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Rationale

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Ravidas (Raidas)

Susan Prill  
Department of Religious Studies, Juniata College,  
Huntingdon, PA, USA

## Synonyms

[Raidas](#); [Rohidas](#); [Ruhidas](#)

## Definition

Ravidas (fl. fifteenth to sixteenth century) was an Untouchable poet-saint from the Varanasi area

who advocated devotion to a formless God. He is considered one of the most important members of the Sant tradition.

## Life and Works

Ravidas (known as Raidas in his Hindi songs) was a fifteenth or sixteenth century poet-saint of the Sant school of bhakti (devotional) poetry. He composed hymns to a formless deity, most often referred to as Ram. As a *chamar* (cobbler or tanner), he was considered an Untouchable and made frequent reference to this fact in his compositions. ([9], p. 198) Tradition holds that he was a native of an Untouchable enclave near Varanasi. Ravidas' compositions were primarily in a precursor to Modern Hindi and are preserved in the Sikh *Guru Granth Sahib* as well as in manuscripts associated with the Dadu Panth of Rajasthan. He is the focus of a number of Ravidasi sects and of the Ravidassia religion, which in 2010 formally separated from Sikhism.

The legends associated with Ravidas' life emphasize his lowly upbringing. He himself mentions his chamar identity numerous times in his compositions. ([6], p. 216) As Ravidas became more popular, efforts were made to tie him to the Brahmin caste, and so early hagiographies by Anantadas and Priyadas speak of him as having been a Brahmin in a previous birth or to have been raised by a Brahmin despite his low birth ([1], p. 232). There are also legends that he was a devotee of the Brahmin saint Ramanand, ([1], p. 233) who appears to have been a liberal Vaishnava and plays a similar role in the life stories of other Sants. Many of these efforts are regarded as insulting by modern chamars. Popular portraits of Ravidas sometimes show him opening his chest to show the sacred thread over his heart, thus showing his inner Brahminhood, a story found in Mahipati's hagiography. ([8], p. 248)

The other controversial element of Ravidas' hagiography is the assertion that he was the guru of the Rajasthani saint Mirabai, a princess from Chittorgarh. Mirabai is best known for her ecstatic poems in praise of the god Krishna, and there is

little in them to suggest the influence of *nirgun* bhakti as practiced by Ravidas. There is an old tradition that Ravidas initiated a royal woman named Jhali from Chittorgarh, and this story seems to have combined with Mirabai's legend over time. ([3], pp. 17–34, [11], pp. 222–4)

Together with Kabir, Ravidas is one of the most prominent Sants of Northern India. The Sants emphasized devotion to a formless God (*nirgun bhakti*) and often came from low castes. [2, 12, 15] They rejected ritualistic religion in favor of a more interior religiosity. Sant beliefs were influenced by Hindu, Sufi, and Yogic thinking. Sant compositions were initially sung by itinerant musicians but began to be written down in the late sixteenth century. As was typical for Sants, Ravidas stressed the importance of a devotional attitude toward a formless God, his preferred name for whom was Ram. Such devotion alone could save humans from the snares of worldly illusion. All external human qualities, including caste and ritual, were regarded as distracting from this goal.

The earliest written source for the compositions of Ravidas appears to be a Rajasthani manuscript from 1582, which lists five songs by him. The next oldest, the Sikh *Guru Granth Sahib* (compiled in 1604), contains 40 songs under Ravidas' name. ([14], p. 9) The largest body of Ravidas compositions are found in several seventeenth century manuscripts associated with the Dadu Panth, each of which contain 65–71 songs attributed to Ravidas. ([3], pp. 27–29) Winand Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck have compiled these into a critical edition of 112 poems. [4] The modern Ravidasi community claims a larger number of compositions, but some of these are stylistically inconsistent with the older Ravidas poems and appear to be fairly recently written. ([5], pp. 18–19)

For Sikhs, Ravidas is significant for two reasons. First, he is included in the *Guru Granth Sahib* as a *bhagat*, one of the saintly figures who preceded Guru Nanak. The forty songs of his in the *Guru Granth Sahib* thus form an important source for Ravidas' compositions, and many Sikhs are familiar with the outline of his hagiography as well. Second, Ravidas serves as a foundational figure for low caste and Dalit (Untouchable) Sikhs, ([10], p. 254) the largest



group of which recently declared itself a new religion, independent from mainstream Sikhism.

There are devotees of Ravidas in many parts of North India. They are largely chamar by caste and often take the surname “Ravidasi” or “Raidasi” as a way of rejecting higher caste Hindu’s discrimination against chamars. A temple in his honor has been built in Sri Govardhanpur, near Varanasi, by members of the chamar community. This temple houses an image of Ravidas and sponsors daily ritual recitation of hymns attributed to him. ([5], p. 19) Temples also exist in Delhi and a number of other cities.

The Sikh Ravidasi community has recently undergone a major shift in identity. Historically, Ravidasi Sikhs grouped together in response to caste discrimination from other Sikh groups and in many cases built separate gurdwaras. The community refers to Ravidas as “Guru Ravidas” and asserts his identity as the most important precursor to Guru Nanak (and thus effectively the founder of Sikhism). The largest Ravidasi group, known as Dera Sachkhand Ballan, recently formally split from Sikhism following the assassination of one of their leaders at a Ravidasi gurdwara in Vienna in 2009. In 2010, this group declared itself a separate religion, to be known as Ravidassia, with rituals and greetings to be distinct from Sikh practice. Most controversially, this move also involved the removal of the *Guru Granth Sahib* from Ravidassia gurdwaras (now known as deras) and its replacement with a text known as *Amritbani Sri Guru Ravidass Ji*. This text is composed of Ravidas’ compositions from the *Guru Granth*. The Ravidassias have also implemented new prayers which are solely Ravidas centered. This change has been controversial, with some Sikh Ravidasis objecting the removal of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and others welcoming it as a move toward self-determination. [7, 13]

## Cross-References

- Bhagats
- Bhakti (bhagti)
- Sants

## References

1. Anantadas (2005) Stories of Ravidas (Raidas). In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
2. Barthwal PD (1936) The Nirguna school of Hindi poetry: an exposition of medieval Santa mysticism. Indian Book Shop, Benares
3. Callewaert WM, Friedlander PG (1992) The life and works of Raidas. Manohar, New Delhi
4. Callewaert WM, Op de Beeck B (1991) Devotional Hindi literature, vols I–II. Manohar, New Delhi
5. Hawley JS, Juergensmeyer M (1988) Songs of the saints of India. Oxford University Press, New York
6. Lochtefeld J (2005) The saintly chamar: perspectives on the life of Raidas. In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
7. Lum K (2010) The Ravidassia community and identity (ies) in Catalonia Spain. Sikh Form 6(1):31–49
8. Mahipati (2005) Rohidas the shoemaker. In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
9. Murphy A (2005) The poems of Ravidas. In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
10. Prasad C, Dahiwal M (2005) Ravidas in the contemporary world. In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
11. Schaller J (2005) The legends of Raidas in word and song: satire and the rhetoric of reform. In: Zelliott E, Mokashi-Punekar R (eds) Untouchable saints: an Indian phenomenon. Manohar, New Delhi
12. Schomer K (1987) Introduction: the Sant tradition in perspective. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
13. Simon C (2010) Dera Sant Sarwan Dass of Ballan: invention of a new form of community assertion experienced and perceived as an individual quest. Sikh Form 6(1):51–62
14. Singh P (2003) The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh self-definition and the Bhagat Bani. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
15. Vaudeville C (1987) Sant Mat: Santism as the universal path to sanctity. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley

## Reality

- Truth (Sikhism)

---

## Reason

### ► Logic (Sikhism)

---

## Reason (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

## Introduction

Reason occupies very important place in the religious as well as philosophical traditions of both the West and India. Man is a rational being; because of this he ever aspires to know the ultimate reality and to establish a close communion with the same. Man thinks over the problems of life and often seeks to find the solution by means of real knowledge. But the distinction between the real or true and false knowledge can be better maintained only through reflective consciousness or reason. Many thinkers have been of the opinion that knowledge itself is possible through reason only because we perceive the things by sense organs but cannot know them altogether without the help of reason. To get the rational knowledge of two or more things together is possible only through reason. Man is a rational being so, by instinct, has reason through which he endeavors to have control over his environment and grasp of the ultimate reality.

Generally, three different sources of knowledge such as sense-experience, reason, and intuition have been accepted in the Indian as well as Western thought. S. Radhakrishnan has held, “while all varieties of cognitive experience result in knowledge of the real, it is produced in three ways, which are sense-experience, discursive reasoning and intuitive apprehension.” [1] Many thinkers are of the opinion that the sense-experience is the only direct and reliable source of knowledge. Those philosophers who consider

the primacy of sense-experience have been described as empiricists. In Indian philosophical tradition Charvaka school of thought holds the view that only sense-experience is a source of valid knowledge. In the Western philosophy, Locke has found his starting place in experience. According to him, all knowledge “is derived either from sensation or from reflection upon sensation.” [2] He was of the opinion that some truths are above reason. Reason provides relational knowledge. It is considered the supreme means of knowledge by all the rationalists in the Western tradition. But it is not a very new concept developed in the Western philosophy only. It is very well known and found from the very beginning of Indian philosophy. The Upanishads maintain distinction between *para vidya*, the higher knowledge which is obtained through intuition and *apara vidya*, the lower knowledge which is obtained through reflective consciousness or reason. As mentioned by a scholar, “The Upanishadic seers fully realize the fact that no amount of mere intellectual equipment would enable us to intuitively apprehend Reality. They draw the same distinction between *apara vidya* and *para vidya*, between lower knowledge and higher knowledge, as the Greek philosophers did between *Doxa* and *Episteme*, between opinion and truth.” [3]

## Definition

Reason has been defined in many ways. According to its etymology, it is traced to “ratio.” The meaning and definition of reason have been viewed variously, some of which can be given as follows: “First, the reason is a special mental faculty (distinct from sensibility and understanding) which is thinking ideas of absolute completeness and unconditionedness and transcends the condition of possible experience. Second, all these mental functions and relations are characterized by spontaneity rather than receptivity. In this sense, reason includes both reason and understanding, but excludes the sensibility. Third is the source of all a-priori synthetic forms of experience. In this sense reason includes elements of sensibility, understanding and reason.” [4] According to

another *Dictionary of Philosophy*, “Reasoning ability is characterized by the fact that notions enter the process of their change, and the theoretical process is directed to specific ideal, leading to the development of the subject of knowledge, of values, etc. If scientific research based on intellectual ability alone is contrary to morality and art, reason creates the atmosphere of their communion.” [5] According to Harris, “The perfection of reason seems to consist in two things: (i) In knowledge and wisdom in the understanding faculty. (ii) In rectitude or righteousness in the will.” [6] Another scholar, Burnet, remarks about reason, “By reason, we usually mean a principle of thought, which, accordingly, as it exerts itself differently, is conceived under different names of understanding and will.” [6] According to another version, “In English the word ‘reason’ has a large number and a wide variety of senses and uses, related to one another in ways that are often complicated and often not clear. However, there is one particular sense of the word in which it, with its synonyms or analogues in other languages, has figured prominently in philosophical controversy. This is the sense, sometimes distinguished typographically by an initial capital – in which the term is taken to designate a mental faculty or capacity – in which reason might, for example, be regarded as coordinate with, but distinguishable from sensation, emotion or will.” [7] In most of the Indian systems of philosophy, *anumana* has been considered one of the *pramanas* (source) of knowledge. According to Nyaya system in *anumana* which is translated as inference, from the knowledge of the sign, we get the knowledge of the object which possesses it. As observed by one scholar, “According to Jayanta, *anumana* is the instrument of the knowledge of an unperceived probandum through the apprehension of a probana with five fold characteristics together with the recollection of the relation of invariable concomitance between the two.” [8]

From the definitions cited above, Indian as well as the Western sources, it can be easily judged that reason provides the relational knowledge. It is considered as the supreme means of knowledge by all the rationalists in the Western tradition. But it is evident from the above discussion that it is not a very new concept developed in the Western

tradition. It is very well known and found from the very beginning of Indian philosophy.

## Reason in Sikhism

Sikhism is a societal religion. The main emphasis of Sikh philosophy is to come out of ignorance and to attain the real knowledge of the Absolute reality and to create the dynamic personality which can be nearer to the Absolute, which can feel the presence of the Absolute and live in tune with Him. The human is to create such conditions in which he can evolve his personality, can rise to that level of highest truth, and help others to attain that ideal. In the very beginning of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the primary scripture of the Sikhs, the basic question put by Guru Nanak, the founder Guru, is “How then to be true? How to remove the veil of untruthfulness”? The answer follows, “His will, inborn in us, thou follow. Thus is truth attained.” [9] In Sikhism the ideal placed before man is to realize the source of his origin, the Ultimate God, who is ever residing with him and to be like the Ultimate because according to Sikhism, the type of God one worships will give the type of life one lives. [10] It will be discussed, how far, according to Sikh philosophy, reason helps to achieve this ideal and create the dynamic personality.

## Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

Reason has been considered as the source of knowledge in Sikh philosophy. Reason has been applied for the philosophical criticism of the prevalent contemporary philosophical and religious notions, traditions, customs, and concepts. According to Kant, “Since religion must be based not on the logic of theoretical reason but on the practical reason of the moral sense, it follows that any Bible or revelation must be judged by its value for morality, and cannot itself be the judge of moral code. Churches and dogmas have value only in so far as they assist the moral development of the race.” [11] In modern philosophy, philosophical criticism has been considered main function of epistemology. Through this process of reason in Sikhism, the concepts of renunciation

(*sannyas*), goodness (*neki*), knowledge (*gian*), etc. have been analyzed. Analytical criticism has been done of the basic concepts and traditions of different religious thoughts prevalent in India at that time. For the abovementioned purpose, both inductive (*agman*) and deductive (*nigman*) reasoning has been used in Sikhism. First, the question has been posed and then the answer is given. As for example, while commenting upon the worship of one God, the stress has been laid on the true ablution in the service of true Guru. In a similar way, the issue of sacred bath is raised in the form of a dialogue. If by bathing alone is attained emancipation, know the frogs are continually bathing and remain in water. As the frogs are born again and again, so is such a person. [12] The meaning applied by this is that they are better qualified to get emancipation. It is believed that if one dies at a sacred place like Varanasi on the banks of Ganges, one goes to heaven or gets emancipation. Such belief is questioned. It is the deeds of man which lead him to heaven or hell, not the place where he lives or die. A hard-hearted person even if he dies at a sacred place like Varanasi cannot escape from hell, and a God's devotee even if he dies at Haramba, which is considered a cursed place, will bring liberation to all his tribe. [13] In the same manner, the claim of the priesthood by birth is questioned. Such claim negates the merit of human birth as to call oneself a high caste. It is not natural or true. The process of taking birth for all human beings is the same. So in order to be a special class or high caste, one has to choose to be born in a different manner. The birth is denied to be the criterion to differentiate between high and low caste. To make it more clear, the question is raised, whether the high caste Brahmin has milk in his veins instead of blood. Bhagat Kabir concludes that only a person alone who contemplates his Lord is in a position to be called a Brahmin among men of God. [14] Reason is used in the abovementioned arguments to dispel ignorance and superstitions.

The words related with reason in Sri Guru Granth Sahib as indicated above are *badi*, *khoji*, *vichar*, *soch*, and *syanaap*. These words are related with searched, found, obtained, seen, reflection,

wisdom, seeking, etc., which may indicate sensory as well as rational knowledge. The seeker is advised to see beyond and behind the outer forms. As for example, *bhekh* is outer form of a religious man. However, when it becomes a mere appearance and is divorced from spirit, then it results in forgotten path (*bhula marag*). It is a natural part of human reason which induces a seeker to go beyond the outer form of *bhekh*. The word *vichar* (reflection) is used in Sri Guru Granth Sahib along with *rattan* (jewel) and *Brahamu*. *Parkhe ratan vichari* is close to reason because search and recognition is involved in it. And the result of this searching is *laha* (a positive gain). [15]

It is evident that reason provides the relational knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of the law of relations among nature, the universe, or between man and God. It is related with the sensory experience and mental faculties of man. In it one moves from the lower level to the higher level. From the lower level and lower law of relations, one perceives the higher law of relations. From nature, the seeker moves to the Absolute. According to Sikh philosophy, reason and devotion, along with God's Grace, lead to the realization of One Supreme Being.

### Nature of Reason in Sikhism

The Sikh Gurus have recognized the important role of reason in the worldly and the spiritual life of human being. A person bereft of reason will be a victim of superstitions and, therefore, not fit to undertake the spiritual journey for the realization of the ultimate goal of life. The role of *mannan*, i.e., contemplation (manne in the Japuji of Guru Nanak), [16] is central to the task of spiritual transformation. An irrational person will fail to perceive the coherence of the universe and also will not be able to comprehend the communicated revelation. The Gurus, have thus, laid emphasis on the need to cultivate reason for the worldly affairs as well as for the spiritual progress. There are two aspects of reason to which the founders of the Sikh religion have drawn the attention. The first aspect, just discussed, is the character of the true seeker (*khoji*). The second is the fruitless or

perverse application of reason which is called *vadi* (or *badi*), which signifies a mere polemic exercise of a fruitless kind.

An actual rational person has to proceed in his search of truth in the spirit of a true seeker (*khoji*). Time and again it is reminded by the Gurus that a seeker (*khoji*) may reach the right conclusion or true knowledge. On the other hand a *vadi* would waste his time in futile discussion. So first, the study of reason in Sikhism is started by determining and analyzing the nature of *khoji* in contradistinction to the *vadi*. Then, the other aspects of reason in Sikhism will be examined and analyzed.

### Khoj and Vadi

One of the important functions of reason is to lead the seeker to the knowledge of truth and to search for truth. The Gurus have called it the *khoj* (seeking of knowledge), and the person who follows this path is termed as the *khoji* (the seeker). Opposed to this is the person who wants to establish his own view with all possible arguments, some of which may even be fallacious, is referred to by the Gurus as the *vadi* or *badi*. The *vad* is though, a free use of syllogistic reasoning but its validity may be sometimes vitiated because of the falsehood of one of the premises. The wrong statement or improper interpretation may be due to the desire to infer a particular conclusion. The *vad* or *bad*, a method of futile reasoning, is criticized and rejected by the Gurus. In this respect, the *vad* appears to signify an attempt to establish by reasoning a preconceived idea. The *vad* and the *khoj* are the two aspects of the process of seeking the knowledge of reality which are the negative and the positive implications of the seeking of knowledge.

The word *vad* (often written as *bad* also and similarly *vadi*, written as *badi* in Punjabi language) is traceable to the word *vad* of the Sanskrit language. Its root is [*vad* + *ghan*]. The word means “to discuss.” [17] Generally, the logical reason is classified as deductive and inductive. The deductive reasoning, when mediate, may assume the form of a syllogistic argument. In this process the person proceeds from the premises to the conclusion, and the premises are the

major premise and the minor premise. The general proposition is the major premise, and the minor premise refers to the particular instance falling under the general proposition. The two premises, taken together, lead to the conclusion. Guru Nanak, while referring to this process of reasoning, says that this may assume the form of *vad* or *bad* (the futile reasoning). It is a wastage and may not lead to any constructive results. [18] To indulge in disputation is not the way of the wisdom or the wise. It is to lose sense. [19] As observed by the third Guru Amar Das, such type of reasoning is unable to lead a man to any knowledge, though one may claim oneself to be a great scholar and interpreter of the scripture. [20] According to him this may lead a person to confusion, not to any knowledge. [21]

It can be seen that the word *badi* is used for a person indulging in this form of reasoning. The *badi* according to Guru Nanak merely destroys an issue without leading to any fruitful culmination of thought. Opposite to this a proper seeker of knowledge undertakes reflection (*vichaar*) and is led to real knowledge; thus, the constructive role of the *khoji* and the destructive engagement of the *badi* are highlighted by Guru Nanak. He has described the *badi* as a possessor of false knowledge and the knowledge in this case being of fallacious nature. [22] The *badi* is related to *binse*. The root of *binse* is Sanskrit word *vinaash*, which means destructive, hidden, and destroyed. [23] The *bad* also limits the scope of knowledge. Its results are mostly negative. The *badi* is not an ideal suggested form to a seeker. We can say that, in the Sikh religion, the *badi* and *khoji* are closely related with reason. The *bad* is an ego-based, narrow aspect of reason which is subjective also. It is non-transcendent and uncreative mental force which is not an ideal form of a seeker. In order to become a true seeker, the negative aspect of the *badi* is highlighted to be avoided by the seeker of true knowledge.

Opposite to *badi* is the *khoji* the positive aspect of reason. The word *khoj* in Punjabi language is formed from the Sanskrit root *Shodh*. The meanings applied by the word are purification, cleaning, correction, and setting right, and the



word *Shodhaka* means purificatory, purifier, and corrective. [24] Furthermore, its root in Sanskrit language is *shod* (*shudh+ghan*): *shudh*, *sanskar*, *sanshodhan*; the word *shodhana*, which in Punjabi language is *khojna*, also means refining, investigation, and examination. [25] As it is clear from its Sanskrit implication, the word *khoj* is the positive aspect of this seeking of knowledge. It is an investigation into the truth and the *khoji* is the seeker of true knowledge. Guru Nanak has described the *khoji* as a seeker of self-realization (*atam chin*). [26] Shankaracharya has referred to self-realization as *atmabodh*. [27] Guru Nanak regards the *khoji* as a creative being (*khoji upjai*). The word *upjai* in Punjabi language is derived from the Sanskrit word *upjan* (*up+jan+ach*). The meaning implied in this word is addition, intellect, and to grow. [28] In Mahan Kosh, the meaning of *upjai* has been described as to win, to be successful, to regenerate, to recreate, and to grow. [29] Keeping in view all these meanings and its etymological perspective, we can say that the word *upjai* used in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is closer to the meaning “to be reproduced” or “to be added.” It may be said that the context of the *khoji* is not individual one, rather it is a cosmic urge for fulfillment. The seeker has also been described as Gurmukh by the Gurus. The ideal for the Gurmukh is held to be the seeking of knowledge and reflection (*gian vichar*). The *khoji* also shares his knowledge with others and performs the acts of social service, the good to others. The social service is an outcome of the inward realization and spiritual evolution, not an externally imposed duty. The seeker or *khoji* is also actively engaged in the fashioning of his insight, concentration (*surat*) through *shabad*. This type of seeking is fruitful. This is rational and proper seeking. The fourth Guru Ram Das [30] suggests the ideal of the *khoj* as the higher knowledge. At the same time the *khoj* is not limited to an individual pursuit. The seeker tries to seek knowledge not only with individual efforts but take the help of others. The mention of *sangat* (congregation) also suggests that the seeking of higher knowledge is open for everybody.

We can say that, in Sikhism, the seeking of truth and true knowledge which leads to creative

results is encouraged as well as appreciated. The search which is static and does not take man out of puzzles is discouraged. Man has got the potentialities of both *khoj* and *bad*. If his seeking of knowledge brings positive results, then he enters into *soch*, the second stage of reason, but if he is unable to transcend the level of *bad*, then he is unable to apprehend the truth and it is harmful.

The other concepts related with reason in Sikhism are *soch*: the second level of reason, then *vichar*, *aqal*, and *sianap*. We will refer to them very briefly.

## The Soch

The word *soch* has more than one meaning. According to one interpretation, it is derived from the word *shucha* in Sanskrit language, where as a noun it means worry (*chinta*, *fikar*), and another word from the same source is *shauch* which stands for cleanliness. [31] In the Hindu *Dharam Kosh* it is interpreted in the second sense, i.e., cleanliness. It does not concern with body only but with the cleanliness of mind also. [32] According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, one form of *soch* with different spellings is concentration and thinking. [33] All these forms are grammatically nouns and their different context is established. One scholar has supported the abovementioned meaning of *soch*. [34] Another scholar has interpreted the word *soch* as reason. [35]

Here we have taken the word *soch* which is referred to the meaning of thinking. The levels of the word *soch* can be brought out while discussing its meaning as the reason also operates at two levels: lower level and higher level. The *soch* is basically concerned with the thinking faculty of man. At the lower level, the *soch* leads to the discovery of new ideas. At the higher level of the *soch*, one is to understand the truth described by the Guru. Its function is to apprehend the *shabad* (reality) through reason.

We can find so many references to this effect in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. For example, Guru Nanak gives an account of the apparent material laws and the *nam* (the name) which is in contrast to the previous one. He has used two words

concentration (*surat*) and reason (*soch*), which according to the Guru, is a storing place to treasure the Name of God. The meaning applied by this saying is that man can apprehend and retain the Name through concentration (*surat*) and reason (*soch*). This is approved by Guru Nanak. This makes the human life worth living and assures the profit and joy of life. The destination of man is to reach the Lord's Name, and the combination of concentration (*surat*) and reason (*soch*) is the real way to reach that destination. [36] Another example can be cited from the compositions of Guru Arjan Dev. The Guru says that a man is wise one who uses reason (*soch*) to apprehend the true Name of God and cherishes with his body and mind the love of the true emancipator. [37] Reason (*soch*), according to Guru Arjan Dev, is not simply a mental faculty but a thinking process under the guidance of God. It is there to understand the cause of causes who is doing everything in His own way and blessing the human being with His Name. Reason (*soch*) in this blessed perspective is the higher one. [38]

## Vichar

Another word related with reason is *mannan* or *manne* and *vichaar*. It is reflection on what one has heard or read from other sources of knowledge. It is very important from the point of view that the seeker is not supposed to accept as it is whatever he has received as knowledge. Reflection (*mannan*) helps the seeker to remove any doubts whatever they are before accepting that knowledge. *Mannan* itself is not an independent source of knowledge regarding highest truth or reality, but it helps the seeker to contemplate upon the knowledge regarding the highest truth to make it clearer. As observed in the Vedanta system of Indian philosophy, "This idea that the oneness of Brahman and Jiva is impossible is removed by pondering over (*vicara*) the Upanishadic statements. This is *manana* or meditation on scriptural statements." [39] So here *mannan* is related with *vichar*, i.e., pondering on the Upanishadic teachings or revelation. Similarly, in Sikhism *mannan* is related with the reflection on

revealed knowledge, the Bani or *shabad*. The revealed knowledge becomes the part of the seeker's personality through contemplation on *shabad* and what he hears from the Guru.

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib we do not find the word *tarka* directly in the context of reason as in Advaita Vedanta but there is threefold way of *sravana*, *mannan*, and *nididhyasana* which is called *sunniai*, *manne*, and *dhyān* in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. *Vichar* is a Sanskrit word which is *vi+car+ghan*. [40] The meanings implied by the word are pondering, deliberation, examination, reflection, investigation, knowing how to discriminate and judge, logical, and disputation. [41] In Sikhism the word has been used in different forms as *vichar*, *bichar*, *vichari*, etc., but there is no difference of meaning with different forms. In Sikhism it is held that to achieve the goal of his life, to realize the essence of his self, the seeker needs the *vichar* or logical discussion on the *shabad* or the Gur-Shabad. The understanding of the *shabad* is possible through *vichar*. *Vichar* is needed to achieve the understanding of the revelation, and it is through *vichar* that the seeker is able to discriminate, to investigate, and to judge.

## Aqal

Next to *vichar* comes *aqal*. The word *aqal* has been used in two senses in Sri Guru Granth Sahib: one is from Sanskrit and another use is from Arabic. When used in the terms of Sanskrit language, it implies many meanings such as indivisible, perfect, whole, and beyond attributes. [42] The other usage of the word is derived from the Arabic language, wherein the word *aqal* is used for reason. The man who is devoid of *aqal* is termed as blind and self-willed by the Guru. Such a person cannot attain the higher knowledge of the *shabad* and cannot understand the essence of human birth. [43] According to the Guru, the reason which does not result in fruitful culmination of thought and leads to futile discussion should not be followed. According to the Guru, one aspect of reason is to help in right understanding of revelation. It is the function of reason to evaluate and correctly apprehend the given

knowledge. It also helps to share this knowledge with others. [44]

## Sianap (Wisdom)

*Sianap* (wisdom) is a higher stage of reason acquired along with *vichar*, *soch*, and *aqal*. According to Mahan Kosh [45] the word *sianap* is a noun and the meanings implied in it are accomplishment, virtue, and elegance, and the *siana* (wise) is an adjective of the same and the meaning of this is a man of knowledge, intelligent, and wise. Again, according to Mahan Kosh, the word *siana* has been derived from the *shaan* an Arabic word. In Arabic it means a man of deeper insight and of broader vision. So the *siana* is a person who uses his/her reason (*soch*, *vichar*, and *aqal*) to understand the things in their right perspective. A *siana* or wise person uses his reason on two levels. On one level he tries to understand the world around him which is related with cause and effect. He understands it through reason. It makes him worldly wise. At the second level, *siana* is one who understands the Truth as expressed by the Guru in Sri Guru Granth Sahib through his *vichar*. It is related with revelation, the bani.

It can be concluded that the function of reason in Sikhism on theoretical level is the discovery of Truth, as is discussed above, to understand the nam which is the manifestation of ultimate truth. On the practical level its ideal is to direct conduct of the seeker, to guide the human being how to live in the world, to take the man away from superstitions, and to make him rational.

## References

1. Radhakrishnan S (1976) An idealist view of life. George Allen and Unwin, Bombay, Second Indian reprint, p 105
2. Cragg GR (1964) Reason and authority in the eighteenth century. Cambridge University Press, London, p 7
3. Ranade RD (1968) A constructive survey of upanishadic philosophy. Bhartya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, pp 239–240
4. Runes DD (1937) The dictionary of philosophy. Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, p 264
5. Frolov I (ed) (1960) Reason and intellect. In: Dictionary of philosophy. Progress Publishers, Moscow
6. Cragg GR (1964) Reason and authority in the eighteenth century. Cambridge University Press, London, p 47
7. Edwards P (ed) The encyclopaedia of philosophy, vol 7. Mcmillan/Free Press, New York, p 83
8. Bijalwan CD (1977) Indian theory of knowledge based upon Jayanta's Nyayamanjari. Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, p 65
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Kiv sachiara hoiai kiv kurhai tutai pali, p 1
10. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Jaisa sevai taiso hoi, p 224
11. Durant W (1976) The story of philosophy. Pocket Books, New York, p 281
12. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Jal kai majani je gati hovai nit nit meduk navahi, p 484
13. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. manahu kathoru marai banarasi naraku na banchiya jaie, p 484
14. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Jau tun brahmanu brahmani jaya tau an bat kahe nahi aya, p 324
15. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. laha ahinisi nautana parkhe ratan vichari, p 56
16. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. mannai surti hovai mani budhi, p 3
17. Vaman Shiv Ram Apte (1973) Vad. In: Sanskrit Hindi Kosh, 3rd edn. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
18. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. vad vkhanai tat nahi janai, p 1032
19. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sachai sarmai bahre agai lhai na dadi. Aqli eh na akhai aqli gvaiai badi, p 1245
20. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. parhi parhi pandit jotki vad krhai bichari, p 27
21. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. ved parhai andin vad smale, p 1066
22. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. seva surati rahas gun gava gurmukhi gian vichara, p 1255
23. Vaman Shiv Ram Apte (1973) Vinash. In: Sanskrit Hindi Kosh. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
24. Williams MM (1981) Shodh. In: A Sanskrit – English dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
25. Vaman Shiv Ram Apte (1973) Shodh (shudh+ghan; shudh sanskar, sanshodhan). Sanskrit Hindi Kosh. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
26. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. seva surati rahas gunh gava gurmukhi gianu bichara, p 1255
27. Avtar Singh, Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 206
28. Vaman Shiv Ram (1973) Upjan. Sanskrit Hindi Kosh. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
29. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Mahan Kosh. Language Department Punjab, Patiala, p 652
30. Shabadrath Sri Guru Granth Sahib (2008) Hau manu tanu khoji bhali bhalaei. S.G.P.C, p. 94
31. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Mahan Kosh. Language Department, Patiala, p 174

32. Raj Bali Pande (1978) Hindu Dharam Kosh Uttar Pardesh Hindi Sansthan, Hindi Samiti Parag, Lucknow, p 635
33. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Mahan Kosh. Language Department Punjab, Patiala, p 174
34. Gopal Singh (1960) Sri Guru Granth Sahib (English translation). Gurdas Kapur and Sons, Delhi, first impression, p 577. And let concentration and reason be the god owns and treasure in there the Lord's name
35. Sohan Singh (1959) The seeker's path, 1st edn. Orient Longmans, Bombay, p 7. We cannot achieve the intuition of the eternal being by reasoning try as we may to reason it out a hundred thousand times (sochai soch na hovai)
36. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. hanu hat kar arja sachu namu kari vathu, p 595
37. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. mira dana dil soch, p 724
38. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. ab kia socha soch bichari karna sa soi kari rahia dehi nam balihari, p 1209
39. Satchida Nanda Murty K (1974) Revelation and reason in Advaita Vedanta. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, p 149
40. Vaman Shiv Ram Apte (1973) Vichar. In: Sanskrit Hindi Kosh. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
41. Williams MM (1981) Vichar. In: A Sanskrit-English dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, p 958
42. Balbir Singh (1972) Nirukt Sir Guru Granth Sahib, vol 1. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 367
43. Steingrass F 'Aql' reason. In: A Persian-English dictionary. Orient Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi
44. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (2008) chilmili bisiar dunia fani qalubi. aql mani gor na mani, p 1291
45. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Mhan Kosh (1970) Language Department Punjab, Patiala, p 142

---

## Reasoning

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Reform and Revivalism

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Relationship

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Relics (Sikhism)

Anne Murphy

Department of Asian Studies, UBC Asian Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

## Synonyms

[Punjab](#); [Sikhism](#)

## Definition

Overview of material culture and sites associated with Sikh tradition.

## Relics in Sikh Tradition

In 2007, objects belonging to the Sixth Guru, Hargobind, visited Vancouver, Canada from India. The objects – including a robe, letters, and a turban – took part in the annual Vaisakhi parade here, in honor of the spring festival associated with the founding of the Sikh Khalsa. Such objects were described in major local newspaper *The Vancouver Sun* as “a symbol of reverence and belief,” and Mrignayan Singh, a resident of Surrey – a Vancouver suburb with a large Sikh population – described them as “a live proof of existence of something that we believe in.” As such, the objects hold “an emotional significance for the community,” and “it is a blessing to be a witness first hand.” [14] In 2008 and 2010, another group of objects came to Vancouver from the village of Bhai Rupa in India, allowing local Sikhs to “connect to the past” and experience it directly. [7] Such objects are thus a part of a vibrant material connection between South Asia-based Sikh traditions and the Sikh Diaspora, reflecting a long historical lineage and connection to a broad array of material and social practices in Sikh tradition.

Such objects can be described as “relics,” relating them to a much broader cross-religious

category of meaning and materiality; at the same time, there are very particular resonances to such objects in the Sikh context. They do not, as is found in some forms of Buddhist and Christian traditions, embody or contain a living aspect of the Gurus or other important persons. They are instead “relics” in the sense identified by Buddhist Studies scholar Kevin Trainor, working as “a technology of remembrance and representation,” with a continuing religious and historical significance for the Sikh community. ([19], p. 26) They enable the participation of the Sikh community in the substantiation and experience of their collective past, providing a means through which the community is constituted and maintained. Through such objects, the past is experienced and proved, and history narrated and performed for a transnational religious community. They refer to the memory of the ten Sikh Gurus, from the first, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), to the final embodied human Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), and of other important persons revered by the community of Sikhs. As such, they act as links with, or memorial technologies to recuperate, the past. In this capacity, they are related to another form of materializing the Sikh past: the historical gurdwara, the congregational site of the Sikh community, where members come together to worship and experience the living presence of the Guru in the form of the canonical text, the Guru Granth Sahib. Historical or *itihāsik* gurdwaras are distinguished by their historical connection to the history of the Gurus or the community.

Sikh religious or “relic” objects are found in gurdwaras and private homes throughout the Punjab and Sikh diaspora, and consist of a wide range of types: clothing, shoes, chariots, and weapons. All are associated with the ten Sikh Gurus, martyrs, or other revered persons. Weapons are the most commonly found type of relic object. Such weapons are, for example, collected and displayed at the center of Takhat Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur, one of the five *takhats* or seats of authority within the structure of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee or SGPC, which manages historical gurdwaras in Punjab today. They are also displayed and described orally – who used them, when, and why – to an

audience every evening in the most prominent of the five *takhats*, the Akal Takhat, across from the Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple, the most important of Sikh shrines today. Such weapons are also collected at smaller sites and in private hands, and are often displayed next to the *Guru Granth Sahib* or in special locked cases in the central congregational hall of a gurdwara.

There are, however, many other types of such sacred objects. There is no one term for these objects in Punjabi: while they are called “relics” in English by some scholars, they are described as *itihāsik vāstuān* (“historical objects”) and *shastar vastar* (“weapons and clothes”) in Punjabi texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which lists of them were compiled. All can generally be described as being *itihāsik* (historical). This term is a general one, but also one that specifically links objects to the sites that commemorate the lives and activities of the Gurus, the *itihāsik* Gurdwaras. Both act to commemorate and create an experiential link to the Sikh past. While a gurdwara is any site where the Sikh sacred scripture, the Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib, lies in state and the congregation of Sikhs gather around it, a special category of the *itihāsik* gurdwara was brought into being in *administrative* terms during the colonial period with the passage of the Gurdwara Reform Act in 1925, which brought all *historical* Sikh Gurdwaras in Punjab under the control of a single body, the SGPC. This designation of one term that is generally used for both objects and sites reflects the underlying conceptual order that links them: both the historical site and object represent relationships in time to the Gurus, and respect for them constitutes a central way of participating in the community in relation to the Sikh past.

The category of the relic in comparative religions is generally defined in two forms: firstly, as “the venerated remains of venerable persons,” and secondly, as “objects that they once owned and, by extension, things that were once in physical contact with them.” ([3], p. 275) Two aspects of the “relic” are thus described: bodily remains, and “objects of use” which are associated with the remembered person. The power of both body and object is said to derive from principles of



“contagious magic,” by which a part of a person’s body or an object associated with her/him can stand for the whole person. Both types of relics are common in the two “ideal” relic cases of Christianity and Buddhism. [4–6, 15, 16, 19] The normative Buddhist tradition since approximately the fifth century C.E. has recognized different classes of relics or *cetiya* that are revered and stand in some physical relationship to the Buddha or holy person: corporeal relics, relics of use, and commemorative relics. ([19], pp. 30, 89) In Christianity, non-bodily or “associative” relics (called above “objects of use”) have a significant role alongside bodily remains, particularly in the memorialization of angels and persons assumed bodily into heaven, such as Jesus and his mother Mary. [10, 20] Indeed, the Eucharist in a sense acts as a kind of infinitely replicable relic for Jesus. ([5], p. 185) Christian traditions also feature the veneration of weapons said to have been used in the Crusades and objects associated with saints, such as bells, staffs, and books. [10] The relationship between the remembered and the representation varies in all of these cases: an object might embody the remembered, as Gregory Schopen has argued is the case for relics in early Buddhism, or act as a memorial device, as is visible in many Islamic traditions, such as the Hazratbal shrine in Kashmir – one of the most famous Muslim relic in India today – that holds the sacred hair of the Prophet Muhammad.

While rare examples of bodily relics do exist in the Sikh tradition, such as the hair of Guru Amardas (in Goindwal, Punjab, India), “objects of use” or associative relics dominate. These, in turn, consist of two primary types: objects used by or owned by the Gurus and/or members of their families (and sometimes, by their important followers) and objects that were gifted by or to the Gurus. An example of first type is the *cholā* [cloak] *sāhib* held at Dera Baba Nanak by the Bedi family, which originally belonged to the first Guru, or kitchen implements revered at the village of Drolli Bhai Ki, because they were used to create food served to the Guru; an example of the second is found in the home of Bhai Dalla, a prominent follower of the Guru in the Malwa section of Punjab. ([13], ch. 2) The collection

housed in his family home (still owned by his descendants) near the Damdama Sahib Takhat complex features several gifts by the Guru to Dalla and his family in recognition of their devotion and service. Many such gifts evoke or even mirror the tradition of *khil’at*, the ritualized gifting of objects between patron and client, materializing that relationship and acknowledging the mutual obligation and connection within it. ([9]; [13], pp. 47–51) Such practices have both political and religious ramifications in a range of settings – among *sufis* as well as in the court context, in both the Mughal court and in the British Raj. These practices were adapted and integrated into evolving Sikh traditions, demonstrating the devotional connections between the Gurus and followers, and particularly the patterns of *sevā* or service that constituted such connections.

### Examples: The Villages of Bhai Rupa and Chak Fatih Singhwala

The objects at Bhai Rupa and Chak Fatih Singhwala, two villages in the southwestern Malwa section of the Indian Punjab, provide examples of the range of objects that are encompassed by the idea of the Sikh relic, and their myriad meanings. ([12]; [13], ch. 1 and 2) Bhai Rupa was founded by and named for Bhai Rup Chand, a disciple of the Gurus, and the relationship between the Gurus and Rup Chand is marked by selfless *sevā* or service. The ancestors of the family served several Gurus and gained objects – and status – that signify and mark this service, and also mark the contribution of the family to the making of Malwa as a Sikh place. This narrative of service and status through the Gurus is repeated throughout Punjab, among other families (Chak Fatih Singhwala, the Dalla family, Dhelma, et al.) and among the descendants of the Guru (such as at Dera Baba Nanak). It is a primary underlying rationale for the collection and display of objects. Indeed, Bhai Rupa as a village was founded with the blessing of the sixth Guru. While the rights to Malwa lands were granted to the Phul family by the Mughal emperor, reference is also made in early

nineteenth-century historical works in both Persian and Punjabi to the role of the Sixth Guru in assisting Mohan (a progenitor of Phul), a Siddhu Jat who had come into conflict with local Bhatti clans. ([1]; [2], ch. 5) Phul's sons founded Bhai Rupa and Alha Singh, the founder of the Patiala state, was the son of Rama, one of these sons. The so-called Phulkia states of Punjab gained their name through this progenitor.

The most prominent of the Bhai Rupa objects is a chariot (*rath*) kept in a house in the center of the village, where it is guarded at all times. The *rath* is said to have belonged to the fourth through seventh Gurus, until passing into the hands of the family of Ram Rai, the son of Guru Har Rai, who was discredited in mainstream Sikh tradition for establishing too friendly a relationship with the Mughal state; it was later given to Bhai Gian Chand (grandson of Bhai Rup Chand, son of Rup Chand's son Sukhanand). According to family patriarch Gurchet Singh, in the 12th generation from Rup Chand, people come to pay their respects to the chariot and "have faith" in it; they ask for things, especially for the blessing of a child. [7] As is common in Malwa, Neem leaves are left in thanks when a wish is granted, in keeping with the general use in the region of neem for auspicious occasions, as well as for purity; for the annual *melā* or festival associated with it, families donate coverings for the *rath*. Most of the remaining objects in the family's collection are kept locked in the family house, located outside the center of the village. The other objects collected and periodically displayed by the family include:

1. The Vairagan of Har Rai, a wooden support used when undertaking spiritual practice/meditation (*sādhana*)
2. Guru Arjan Dev's sandals
3. The sandals of Mata Ganga (the wife of Guru Arjan Dev, mother of Guru Hargobind)
4. Guru Gobind Singh's shield (called a "*dhāl*")
5. The rope used for keeping a bird (called a *pinjārā*)
6. The *rabāb* (stringed musical instrument) of the Fifth Guru, Arjan
7. Multiple miniature paintings
8. The frame of a cot (*manjī*) used by Guru Hargobind, restrung with new ropes
9. The original ropes for the *manjī*, preserved in a plastic bag
10. Mata Ganga's *rath* cover from Dehra Dun, hand sewn
11. *Hukamnāme* or order letters from Gurus, the wives of the Gurus, and Banda Singh Bahadur
12. A hand-written manuscript of the Adi Granth

Pilgrims come for *darshan* (viewing) of the family's hand-written manuscript and other objects, as well as of the *rath*.

Weapons are perhaps the most ubiquitous of relic objects related to the Gurus across different sites, but there are numerous domestic and other items in this list. Indeed, the village of Bhai Rupa itself also functions as a kind of relic, mapping historical memory onto place. The old *mitthī* (clay) house of Bhai Rup Chand is located within the village, a short distance from the location of the Rath. This is the house where *langar* or the community meal was made for the sixth Guru, and where he stayed for 6 months. It is not generally kept open, as the building housing the Rath is, but is made available for occasional viewing. Pilgrims come here, Gurchet Singh noted, to "get healthy." The wooden stake associated with the founding of the village by Bhai Rup Chand and Guru Hargobind is preserved in the side-wall of the house, and is viewable through doors from both the outside and inside.

*Hukamnāme* are important as historical documents – rare documents authored by the Gurus (aside from the compositions included in the Adi Granth and Dasam Granth) and, at least partially, in the Gurus' hands. But they also, like the Adi Granth (and in certain contexts, the Dasam Granth) itself, exist as objects themselves – objects of veneration and display, as *material* historical evidence. ([18], p. 5; [13], pp. 107, 108) Such a practice is attested to early in Sikh tradition. In the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama, generally dated to the mid-eighteenth century, for example, it is said that "well-known Sikhs, descendants of the Guru, or bearers of *hukamnāme*" are worthy of respect. ([17], p. 106) According to W.H. McLeod,

reverence is argued for the families of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, and Guru Amar Das, and that the Guru is “present within those commands [*hukam*] which I gave in written form” in the Prahlad Rai Rahitnama (dated by him to the 1730s). ([11], pp. 287, 288) Such a practice of display and veneration is maintained at Bhai Rupa, where *hukamnāme* are placed alongside other objects of veneration. The documents are marked in various ways with the signs of their authors, and these signs or stamps act as a physical marker of the Guru’s presence. As Ganda Singh noted early on, the practice of affixing the Guru’s mark (*nishān*) upon versions of the Adi Granth was common from the time of the fifth Guru onward, when versions of the text became more common. ([18], p. 13) Such a mark did not consist of the name of the Guru, but rather a representation of *ik onkār*, in some fashion; it acted as “the sign or memory of the Guru,” allowing the formless form or *murti* of the Guru to become visible. ([18], p. 14) The *hukamnāme* of Mata Sundari and Mata Gujarī are revered alongside those of the Gurus, even when their authority is articulated within the text of the documents differently than that of the Gurus, referring to the will of the Gurus. ([18], p. 17) The content of the text of the *hukamnāme*, in general, articulates the authority of the Guru through the key persons to which the letters were addressed. Primarily, the documents served two main purposes: to maintain connections between the Gurus and distant Sikh communities and to garner support (sometimes in the form of actions, sometimes in material forms) from these communities for the maintenance of the community as a whole, such as weapons and/or armed soldiers for fighting, and provisions for the maintenance of the *langar*. ([18], p. 5ff)

It was noted earlier that *sevā* constitutes the relationships between the Guru and devotees that are substantiated through the material objects gifted by the Guru to the families in question (paralleling, of course, the many gifts given to the Guru by these same families). The *hukamnāme* function in a parallel way, attesting to and drawing on relationships with the Guru and within the community, constituted by service and intimacy. *Sevā* is only one aspect of the relationship between Guru and devotee, but it is

definitive, and expresses the inherently relational quality of devotion in its every aspect. This relationship of service, in the case of Chakk Fatih Singhwala, is here not only attested in the gifts that the Guru gave to the family of his own objects, but through the objects that belonged to the family members themselves, which are preserved and displayed. One of the most important of these family members is Mai or Mata Desaan, who had a special relationship with the Guru. [12]

If you visit Chakk Fatih Singhwala today, you will find a large Gurdwara or Sikh congregational site designed to house a number of objects that relate to Guru Gobind Singh. [8] Objects at the site include a *manjī* or cot, on which the Tenth Guru is said to have reclined; a *tawā*, or large cooking surface which is said to have belonged to Mai Desaan and was used by her to make bread for the Guru; a low chair, said to have belonged to Mai Desaan, and upon which the Guru’s wife Mata Sahib Devi sat; and a silk *dastār* or turban cloth of Guru Gobind Singh and other clothing belonging to the Guru and his wife. The site thus features a wide array of objects, and a number of users of these objects, including the Guru’s wife and members of the head family of the village, for whom the village was named. Objects related to the wives of the Guru are not unknown at sites like this; although they are not common, they are collected alongside objects specifically related to the Gurus themselves. This presence of objects related to the Guru’s wives reflects not only their importance in relation to the Guru, but also the independent importance of the Guru’s wives themselves: the wives of the Tenth Guru led segments of the community during the troubled years after the tenth Guru’s death. ([18], pp. 34ff and 197–231) The case of Mai Desaan, however, provides an example of the representation of a woman who had no other relationship with the Guru but one constituted by *sevā* or “service” to him. Thus, object traditions reveal how women are memorialized in Sikh tradition, in different kinds of relationships to the Guru. Mai Desaan was the widow of one of the patriarchs of the Chakk Fatih Singhwala family. She was childless, and as a result was not treated with respect and kindness in the family. When the Guru visited this

village and this family, he exposed this and other intrigues, such as the estrangement of two brothers in the family. His acceptance and valuation of Mai Desaan's expression of devotion raised her status in the family as an honored servant of the Guru.

The ways in which reverence for objects on a *general* level expresses relationships is convincingly portrayed in an example that does not relate directly to the Gurus. Similar collecting and display practices are visible within other families nearby, in remembrance and honor of the main Chakk Fatih Singhwala family. The members of the family of Amir Singh were, for example, *sevādārs* (servants) of the Mai Desaan's family. Currently living in Kaan Singhwala, a nearby village, the family possesses a series of objects (a *vairāgin*, bedsheet, comb, and clothing) associated with Sangu Singh, a member of the Chakk Fatih Singhwala family who, according to Jasbir Singh of Chakk Fatih Singhwala, had "great affection" for Guru Gobind Singh. They also hold clothing that belonged either to Mai Desaan or Mai Viro, the wife of Sangu Singh (different members of the family remember this differently); they also hold a pair of Mai Desaan's shoes. Amir Singh and other members of the family did not know the details of the connection between Sangu Singh and the Tenth Guru, nor did they know much about the woman being commemorated by the objects in their possession. Both, however, are remembered for their connection to the Guru, and to the family. The authority of the Guru thus operates through others, locally, and contributes to memorial practices that are more general.

Relics, therefore, attest to and substantiate relationships. At Chakk Fatih Singhwala, we see how connections of service to the Guru are remembered – and are tied in ongoing ways to status. The narratives presented by Jasbir Singh today valorize several different things: (1) service of the Guru, (2) the negotiation of complex relationships in relation to the Guru, (3) the Guru's ability to see through and reconcile familial problems, and (4) the special devotion of women. The objects constitute family and local history, but these histories matter in a particular way because of their relationship to the Gurus.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that relics have not received a great deal of attention in the literature on the Sikh tradition, they represent an important aspect of the broader engagement of the community with the representation of the past. [13] Historical Gurdwaras have received a great deal more attention in this role: such gurdwaras are ubiquitous in Punjab and indeed anywhere the Gurus were said to have traveled. They are fundamentally related to the relic object in Sikh tradition because both are revered as a result of their connection to the Gurus and other important persons in the tradition – they provide a link, a material form of memory. They are *itihāsik* or "historical." These memories are structured into a larger narrative of the Sikh past that is materially administered by the SGPC, which manages historical Gurdwaras in Punjab. While relic objects tend to be collected and displayed by individuals and families, they are also held in museums – such as in the Central Sikh Museum in Amritsar – and private collections that are made available to the public – such as that of the Maharaja of Patiala – and in Gurdwaras and Takhts, from Amritsar to Nander to Patna. Through such public engagements and viewing practices, the Sikh past is made present and is experienced. This contributes to a larger experience of being Sikh, grounded in the ideas and practices enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib, the text that is the living Guru of the community, and the congregation that gathers around it.

## Cross-References

- [Art \(Sikh\)](#)
- [Pilgrimage \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Bhangu RS (1993) *Prachin Panth Prakāsh* (ed: Vir Singh. 1841, reprint). Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi
2. Dhavan P (2011) *When sparrows became hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699–1799*. Oxford University Press, New York

3. Eliade M (ed) (1987) *The encyclopedia of religion*. Macmillan, New York
4. Geary PJ (1978) *Furta sacra: thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
5. Geary PJ (1994) *Living with the dead in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca
6. Geary PJ (1994) *Phantoms of remembrance: memory and oblivion at the end of the first millennium*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
7. Interviews with members of the Bhai Rupa family, 2002 and 2008, and with several members of the *sangat* or community who came to view the images, November 12–13, 2008, at the Dasmesh Darbar Gurdwara in Surrey, BC. Interviews with Bhai Gurchet Singh and Bhai Buta Singh in Bhai Rupa in 2002; with Bhai Buta Singh in Vancouver in 2008
8. Interviews with Jasbir Singh of Chakk Fatih Singhwala were undertaken in 2002 and 2005. Interviews with Amir Singh of Kaan Singhwala were undertaken in 2002
9. Gordon S (ed) (2003) *Robes of honour: Khil'at in pre-colonial and colonial India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
10. Lucas AT (1986) The social role of relics and reliquaries in ancient Ireland. *J Roy Soc Antiq Ireland* 116:5–37
11. McLeod WH (2003) *Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
12. Murphy A (2009) Objects, ethics, and the gendering of Sikh memory. *Early Mod Women Interdiscip J* 4:161–168
13. Murphy A (2012) *The materiality of the past: history and representation in Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, New York
14. Sandhu Bhamra A (2007) Vaisakhi parade to feature float with holy articles. *The Vancouver Sun*, Saturday, Apr 14, p B7
15. Schopen G (1997) *Bones, stones and Buddhist monks: collected papers on the archaeology, epigraphy and texts of monastic Buddhism in India*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu
16. Sharf RH (1999) On the Allure of Buddhist relics. *Representations* 66:76–99
17. Singh C (1987) *The Chaupa Singh Rahit Nama* (trans and ed: McLeod WH). University of Otago Press, Dunedin
18. Singh G (1999) *Hukamname: Gurū sāhibāṃ, mātā sāhibāṃ, bandā singh ate khālsā ji de. 1967?* Publication Board, Panjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, Reprint
19. Trainor K (1997) *Relics, ritual, and representation in Buddhism: rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravada tradition*. Cambridge University Press, New York
20. Weyl Carr A (2001) *Threads of authority: the Virgin Mary's Veil in the Middle Ages*. In: Gordon S (ed) *Robes and Honor: the medieval world of investiture*. Palgrave, New York

---

## Religious Leader

- [Ramdas \(Guru\)](#)

---

## Religious Practices

- [Ritual \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Revivalism

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Rites

- [Ritual \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Ritual (Sikhism)

Virinder S. Kalra  
Sociology, SOSS, University of Manchester,  
Manchester, UK

---

## Synonyms

[Religious practices](#); [Rites](#)

---

## Definition

Practices of Sikhs associated with spiritual and bodily transformation.

---

## Sikh Ritual

Reading the many sayings of Guru Nanak in the *Adi Granth*, there is a distinct sense that the prevailing religious rituals of the time, bathing in



the river Ganges, wearing the sacred thread, tantric yoga, and routine prayer (as in the Muslim *Namaaz*), were in of themselves acts of false piety. They could be redeemed if they were carried out with the right intention, but if this were present then the ritual itself might not be so important. Contemplation and wonderment at the *nam* or the word is the only ritual worth carrying out, and in a sense this is to be done at all times rather than in any special setting or context, which would ossify an active, creative praxis. This meditative practice is formalized in repetition of the word “*Waheguru*” and commonly known as *nam-simran*. It constitutes a central aspect of individual and collective worship. The best time to engage in *nam-simran* is the *amrit vela*, the ambrosial hour, just before dawn which is perhaps the nearest that one can get to a prescribed practice within the pages of the *Adi Granth*. (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਉ ਵਡਿਆਈ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥) p. 2/ Nanak

It is the *Adi Granth* itself as a physical object and as a repository of writings which is the central locus of the daily acts of worship that constitute Sikh collective practice. Treated like a living person, the *Adi Granth* is revered and treated in the same manner as that of the living Guru. A place of Sikh collective worship is signified by the presence of the book. Sikhs prostrate out of reverence and respect and place money in front of the *Adi Granth*, by way of offerings to the Guru. The *Adi Granth* is sat on a throne with a royal covering with an attendant whisking away flies and other insects from the book. At night, at the end of congregational worship, the book is ceremoniously taken (with some pomp at the *Darbar Sahib* in Amritsar) to a resting place (the *Sach Khand*), and then before the recitation of *Asa Di War* in the early hours of the morning, the *Adi Granth* is brought back to the congregational setting. All of the performances of the poems and hymns of the book are conducted in front of it, to some extent evoking the Guru's court and the musician therein. These daily collective rituals overlap with individual practice, which is directed by the recitation of various prayers – in the morning the *Japji*, *Jaap*, and *Swayya* and, in the evening, the *Rehras* and before sleep the *Sohilla*. After each act of collective worship, the *Ardas* or supplication is also recited.

The *Adi Granth* is also the center of what has become the most common ritual activity associated with festivals or special occasions, such as the Guru's birth and death anniversaries as well as individual times of celebration. The *Akhand Path* or complete reading of the *Adi Granth* over a period of approximately 48 h without break has become something that almost all Sikh families participate in at some point in the life cycle. To some extent these have also become part of the routine practice of Gurdwaras; the *Darbar Sahib* in Amritsar has over 100 *Akhand Paths* sponsored by various people taking place at any one time. These continuous readings are organized and performed by paid officials of the *Gurdwara*. This completely outsourced *Akhand Path* has to be contrasted with those who carry out the ritual in their homes, engaging in the reading amongst their own families and providing *langar* – free food – on that basis.

If *Nam Simran* is a practice to carry out inner transformation, there are a number of rituals that categorize Sikhism in terms of transformation of the self through bodily practices. Perhaps the most common of these is the tying of the turban, something by which Sikh males have come to be identified (even though some women also wear this form of head covering). For turban wearers, the tying of the turban has a normative aspect (as with any daily bodily practice) but also a ritual aspect in that it transforms the appearance of the wearer and is intimately tied in the representation of Sikh identity. Even for those who do not keep uncut hair, attendance at Gurdwara or any special function may involve the tying of a turban, in a sense a ritual of tying oneself into the community.

In a formal aspect, the wearing of a turban and keeping unshorn hair is a subset of the wider transformative ritual: *Amrit chakna*, the initiation rite into the *Khalsa* order. This ceremony is the most profound and distinct ritual within the Sikh canon and is entry into the *Khalsa* or the pure. By sharing in the *Amrit* and literally undergoing a bodily transformation through the donning of a new uniform and adhering to a new code of conduct, the ritual space is the most intense in terms of demanding significant changes. The ritual itself is also considered most auspicious if carried out at the time of Vaisakhi, evoking the

original *Amrit* ceremony carried out by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Though the ritual is quite standardized in terms of the prayers and giving of *Amrit* (literally water of immortality, in practice a sacralized water, sugar mixture), certain groups such as *Nihangs* have additional rituals as part of the ceremony. But the central concern is with transformation, sometimes involving the taking of a new name, again implying the formation of a new identity.

When considering life cycle rites associated with birth, marriage, and death, the centrality of the *Adi Granth* and recitation of its writings to music is apparent. For example, the *Anand Karaj* (blissful occasion) or marriage ceremony involves initially the bride and groom sitting and facing the *Adi Granth* either in a Gurdwara or in a family setting. The bride and groom circumambulate the *Adi Granth* to verses sung from the book penned by Guru Ram Das. After the fourth round, the simple ceremony is concluded with more verses and then the *Ardas*. The *Anand Karaj* illustrates the way in which Sikh rites are based in the *Adi Granth*, in terms of its writings as well as presence.

## Cross-References

- [Amritdhari](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Japji](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Cole W, Sambhi P (1998) *The Sikhs: their religious beliefs and practices*. Sussex Academic Books, Sussex
2. Fenech F (2008) *The darbar of the Sikh gurus: the court of God in the world of men*. OUP, India
3. Joshi LM (ed) (1990) *Sikhism*. Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala
4. Kalra V (2005) Locating the Sikh Pagh/turban. *Sikh Form* 1:75–92
5. Myrvold K (2007) Inside the Guru's gate: ritual uses of texts among the Sikhs in Varanasi. *Media-Tyrck*, Lund
6. Oberoi H (1994) *The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. OUP, New Delhi
7. Singh N (2000) Why did I not light the fire? The refeminization of ritual in Sikhism. *J Femin Stud Relig* 16:63–85

## Rituals

- [Anand Sahib](#)

## Rohidas

- [Ravidas \(Raidas\)](#)

## Ruhidas

- [Ravidas \(Raidas\)](#)

---

# S

---

## Sabad

- ▶ [Kirtan \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Sabada

- ▶ [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Sabd

- ▶ [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Sabda

- ▶ [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Saint

- ▶ [Ramdas \(Guru\)](#)

---

## Samskara

- ▶ [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Samskara (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal  
Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

---

## Synonyms

[Anna prasanam](#); [Annaprashana](#); [Ashta samskara](#);  
[Karnavedha](#); [Samskara](#); [Sankhara](#); [Sanskara](#);  
[Shodasha samskara](#); [Snana](#)

---

## Definition

*Samskara* is from the Sanskrit *sansakara*. *Samskara* is a rite of passage, or the ceremonies that mark important events in a person's life. These ceremonies are related with events like marriage, baptism, the birth of the child, death, etc. Every religion and world culture has such ceremonies. The literal meaning of the word *samskara* is to purify, refine, supplement, or

brighten the inner conscience of the person. *Samskaras* are performed to inculcate human values, as though planting the seeds of these values at key moments throughout a person's life; these ceremonies allow for the transformation of someone's personality so that he can fulfill his duties (*dharma*) towards his family and society.

## Introduction

Just as every religion or culture has prescribed its own ceremonies to be performed by its followers, Sikhism, too, prescribes various ceremonies related with different events in a Sikh's life; these ceremonies may be found in the *bani* of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib as well as in the sayings of the Gurus. In modern times, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is the main governing body of Sikh institutions and preaching of Sikhism; in order to preserve the teachings of the Gurus as told in *bani*, *hukamnamas*, and *rehatnamas*, the SGPC – with the help of Sikh scholars – prepared the Sikh *Rehat Maryada*, or code of conduct, for the Sikh community to follow both in daily life and special occasions. Some examples follow.

## Ceremonies (Samskaras) Related with Birth and Naming of the Child

According to the Sikh *Rehat Maryada*, as soon as a mother becomes capable of moving about and bathing after the birth of the child, the family and relatives go to a Gurdwara with *karhah prashad* (sacred pudding) or get *karhah prashad* made in the Gurdwara. The family must recite in the holy presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib hymns that are expressive of joy and thankfulness, such as “The Almighty Lord has granted support” [1] and, “The True Lord has sent this gift.” [2] After concluding the reading of the holy Guru Granth Sahib, the *hukam* (command) is taken from the Granth Sahib. A name starting with the first letter of the Shabad of the *hukam* is proposed by the *granthi* (man in attendance of Guru Granth Sahib); after its acceptance by the congregation, the *granthi*

announces the name. A boy's name contains the suffix “Singh” and a girl's name contains the suffix “Kaur.” After the announcement of the name, the Anand Sahib (the composition of third Guru in Raag *Ramkali*) is recited, the Ardas is offered in appropriate terms expressing joy over the naming ceremony, and the *karhah prashad* is distributed. [3] In the *Rehat Maryada*, the ceremonies are the same for the birth of either a boy or a girl.

The *Rehat Maryada* also explains that no superstition is allowed related to the birth of a child. For instance, one must not subscribe to superstition regarding the pollution of food and water in consequence of birth, for the holy writ states that “Birth and death are by His ordinance; coming and going is by His will. All food and water are, in principle, clean, for these life-sustaining substances are provided by Him.” [4]

## Amrit Sanskar (Ceremony of Khande di Pahul)

*Amrit sanskar* is the most important and unique event in the life of a Sikh. With this *sanskar*, one gets converted from the ordinary Sikh community into the Khalsa, a combination of spirituality and worldliness. It was first performed on the *panj piyare* (five beloved ones) by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh on Vaisakhi of 1699; after the Guru got *amrit* from the *panj piyare*, he became Gobind Singh instead of Gobind Rai. This is described in the *Rehat Maryada* as follows:

The ceremony of *Khande di Pahul* (*amrit sanskar*) should be held at an exclusive place away from common human traffic. At the place where the ceremony is administered, the holy Guru Granth Sahib is installed and ceremonially opened. Six *amritdhari* committed Sikhs – either men or women – are present there, having taken a bath and washed their hair; one of these Sikhs attends to the Guru Granth Sahib, and the other five administer the *Khande di Pahul*.

The beloved ones (*panj piyare*) who administer the *Khande di Pahul* should not include disabled persons, such as a person who is blind or blind in one eye, lame, has a broken or disabled limb, or

a chronic disease. These persons should also not include anyone who has committed a breach of Sikh discipline and principles: all of them should be committed *amritdhari* Sikhs with appealing personalities.

Any man or woman of any country, religion, or caste who embraces Sikhism and solemnly undertakes to abide by its principles is entitled to *Khande di Pahul* (*amrit*).

The person to be *amritdhari* should not be of very young age; he or she should have attained a plausible degree of maturity; he or she must have taken bath, washed his/her hair, and must wear all five Ks: *kesh* (unshorn hair), *kirpan* (sword), *kacchera* (prescribed shorts), *kangha* (comb tucked into the hair), and *kara* (steel bracelet). He/she must not have any other token of faith on his/her person. He/she must not have his/her head bare or wearing a cap. He/she must not be wearing any ornaments piercing through any part of the body. The person to be *amritdhari* stands respectfully with folded hands facing Guru Granth.

One from amongst the five beloved ones administering the *Khande di Pahul* explains the principles of the Sikh religion to the person seeking to be *amritdhari*. He should conclude his exposition of the principles of Sikh religion with the query: "Do you accept these willingly?"

On an affirmative response from the seeker of *Khande di Pahul*, one from amongst the five beloved ones performs the Ardas for the preparation of *Khande di Pahul* and takes the holy *hukam* (command). The five beloved ones come close to the bowl for preparing the *Khande di Pahul*. The bowl is of pure steel and should be placed on a clean steel ring or other clean support. Clean water and sugar puffs are put in the bowl, and the five beloved ones sit around it in *bir* posture (*bir assan*) and recite the following scriptural compositions: Japji, Jaap, the ten *Sawayyas* (commencing with *sarawag sudh*), the Benti Chaupai (from "*hamri karo hath de racha*" to "*dusht dokh te leho bachai*"), and Anand Sahib. One of the five beloved ones who recites the scripture holds the edge of the bowl with his left hand and keeps stirring the water with a *khanda* (double-edged sword) held in his right hand, doing so with full concentration. The rest of the beloved ones grip

the edge of the bowl with both hands, concentrating their full attention on the *Khande di Pahul*. After the conclusion of the recitation, one from amongst the beloved ones performs the Ardas.

Only that person seeking *amrit* who has participated in the entire ceremony of *amrit sanskar* can be considered *amritdhari*.

After the Ardas in which the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, is remembered, every person seeking to be *amritdhari* sits in *bir assan*, putting his/her right hand on the cupped left hand and is made to drink the *amrit* five times, as the beloved one who pours the mix into his cupped hand exclaims: "Say, *Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh!* (The Khalsa is of the Wondrous Destroyer of darkness; victory, too, is His!)." After imbibing the *amrit*, the newly *amritdhari* person repeats "*Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.*" Then five handfuls of *amrit* are sprinkled into the eyes of the person becoming *amritdhari* and another five into his hair. Each such sprinkling is accompanied by the chant "*Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh,*" recited first by one of the five beloved ones and then repeated by the person getting *amrit*. Whatever *amrit* is left over after the administration of the *Khande di Pahul* (*amrit*) to all individual seekers is sipped by all *amritdharis* together.

After this, the five beloved ones communicate the name of *Waheguru* to all who have been administered the *Khande di Pahul*, after which they recite to them the *Mul Mantar* and make them repeat it aloud: *Ik aunkar satnam karta purakh nirbhau nirwair akal murat ajuni saibhang gur parsad.*

From now on for the *amritdhari*, Guru Gobind Singh is the Father, Mata Sahib Kaur is the mother of the *Amritdhari*, and his residence is Anandpur Sahib.

## Anand Sanskar (Sikh Wedding and Conventions)

*Anand Sanskar*, [5] usually called *Anand Karj*, is a very important event in the life of any Sikh man or woman, as the Sikh Gurus considered the family life more important than asceticism for the



spiritual realization of the self. According to the Sikh code of conduct, caste and descent should not be considered when entering wedlock, a Sikh man or woman should marry another Sikh, and the wedding ceremony should be solemnized by *Anand* marriage rites. Child marriage is taboo for Sikhs. Marriage may or may not be preceded by engagement ceremony, but if an engagement ceremony is held, it should be held in a congregational gathering in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib; after offering Ardas, a kirpan, a steel *kara*, and some sweets may be given to the groom.

Consulting a horoscope for determining an auspicious day or otherwise fixing a day is a sacrilege. Any day suitable to the both parties by mutual consultation should be fixed. Other rites, like putting on floral or gilded face ornaments, decorative headgear, or a red thread band round the wrist, worshipping ancestors, reciting couplets, performing *havans*, installing *vedi*, etc., are all sacrilegious as these rites are associated with Hindu marriage.

The marriage party should be as small as the girl's people desire. The two parties greet each other singing sacred hymns and with the Sikh salutation *Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh*. The *Anand* ceremony is performed in a congregational gathering in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. The girl and boy are made to sit facing the Guru Granth Sahib. After soliciting the congregation's permission, the master of the marriage ceremony (who may be a man or a woman) bids the boy and girl and their parents or guardians to stand and offer Ardas for the commencement of the *Anand* marriage ceremony. The officiant then apprises the boy and the girl of the duties and obligations of conjugal life according to the Guru's teachings. He/She initially gives to the two an exposition of their mutual obligations as told in the *bani* of the Guru Granth Sahib.

The boy and girl bow before the Guru Granth Sahib to demonstrate their acceptance of these instructions. Thereafter, the girl's father or guardian principal relation makes the girl grasp one end of the sash which the boy is wearing over his shoulders. The person in attendance of the Guru Granth Sahib recites the matrimonial circumambulation stanzas, or *lavan* (composed by

the Fourth Nanak Guru Ram Das in the *Suhi* Rag). [6] After the conclusion of each of the stanzas, the boy, followed by the girl holding the end of the sash, goes round the Guru Granth Sahib while the *raagis* or the congregation sing out the recited stanza. The boy and the girl, after every circumambulation, bow before the Guru Granth Sahib. Because there are four circumambulation stanzas in the concerned hymn, the proceeding will comprise four circumambulations. After these are complete, the boy and the girl bow before Guru Granth Sahib and sit at the appointed place and the *raagi* or appointed person recites the first five stanzas and the last stanza of *Anand* Sahib. [7] Thereafter the Ardas is performed and the *karhah prashad* is distributed.

If the girl's parents visit their daughter, they can eat meal there. Abstaining from eating is a superstition and Sikhism does not believe in superstitions. Widow remarriage of the girl is not a taboo in Sikhism.

### Antam Sanskar (Funeral Ceremonies)

According to the Sikh code of conduct, the body of the dying or dead person is not removed from the cot and neither is any lamp lit or any other such ceremony performed which is contrary to the teachings of the Guru. Taking death as God's will, no family member or relatives should grieve, cry, or indulge in breast beating. *Bani*, or simply the phrase *Waheguru*, should be recited.

The body should be cremated no matter the age of the deceased. However, where arrangements for cremation cannot be made, the body can be immersed in flowing water or disposed of in any other manner. There should not be any consideration of the time of cremation, whether it is day or night.

The dead body is bathed and clothed in clean clothes; the Sikh symbols – *kangha*, *kacchera*, *kara*, and *kirpan* – should not be removed. After putting the body on a plank, Ardas is performed. On the way to the cremation ground, *bani* is recited. After placing the dead body on the pyre, Ardas is offered again for consigning the body to the fire; then the son or any other relative sets fire to the bier, and other people continue singing

*shabads*. When the pyre is fully aflame, the *Kirtan Sohila* (night scriptural prayer) is recited and Ardas offered. Upon returning from the cremation grounds, a reading of Guru Granth Sahib is commenced at home or at a nearby Gurdwara, and after reciting six stanzas of Anand Sahib, Ardas is offered and *karhah prashad* is distributed. The reading of Guru Granth Sahib should be completed on the tenth day after the death; if it is not possible to do so on the tenth day, some other day may be appointed for the conclusion of the reading. If possible, the reading should be done by the family members of the deceased. No funeral ceremony remains to be performed after the tenth day.

When the pyre is burnt out, the whole bulk of the ashes, including the burnt bones, should be gathered up and immersed in flowing water or buried at that very place and the ground leveled. Raising a monument to the memory of the deceased at the place where his/her dead body is cremated is a taboo.

## References

1. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M.5, p. 628
2. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M.5, p. 396
3. Sikh Reht Maryada, Hosted by SGPC, Amritsar
4. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M.1, p. 472
5. Sikh Reht Maryada, Hosted by SGPC, Amritsar
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M.4, pp. 773–774
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M.3, p. 917

## Sanity

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Sankhara

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Sanskara

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Sant Sipahi

Randeep Hothi

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Saint-Soldier

### Main Text

Sant Sipahi is the ideal Sikh, one who has the qualities of sainthood as well as martial prowess and discipline. [1] The word Sant, roughly translating to Saint, is an honorific for gifted preceptors that guide the Sikh community. However, the notion of a Sant cannot be confined to apolitical persons. Examples such as Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale demonstrate that Sikh's understandings of what it is to be a Sant allows for the military and political. The term dual term Sant Sipahi can be understood as the conjunction of two concepts, or rather that notions of Sant or notions of Sipahi are already implicated in one another. The exemplary Sant Sipahi figure in Sikhism is the Khalsa. [1–3]

The Sant Sipahi unity arises over the span of Sikh tradition. One is the idea of Miri Piri, introduced by Guru Hargobind. Miri and Piri are the names of two swords worn by Guru Hargobind Singh, referring to temporal and spiritual sovereignty, respectively. The introduction of Miri Piri marked a time when Sikhs first began to exercise martial organization and warfare. [4] This is also marked by the erection of the Akal Takht adjacent to the Harmandir Sahib. The Akal Takht gurdwara, constructed under the purview of Guru Hargobind, signifies the supreme temporal authority possessed by the Guru. [5]

Another parallel notion is Deg Teg Fateh, an expression notoriously difficult to translate, roughly meaning “victory to the cauldron and sword,” which seems to have been in circulation from the time of Guru Gobind Singh and onwards.

Deg refers to the large iron cookware used in sustaining the tradition of langar. The unity of the Deg and Teg, alluded to in the Dasam Granth, but most explicitly mentioned in the Ardas, combines notions of charity with that of martial exercise. [1, 4, 6]

Sant Sipahi is one of the many “opposing yet conjoined” concepts. [7] The Guru Granth Sahib unifies the Sant and Sipahi: [8]

In the realm of grace spiritual power is supreme, nothing else avails. Brave and strong warriors in whom the Lord’s spirit lives dwell there, those who are blended with him by singing his praises. Their beauty is beyond description, the Lord lives in their hearts. They do not die and are not deceived.

The Congregations of the blessed live there too. They dwell in bliss with the True One in their hearts (AG [8]).

For another case, consider the composition attributed to Bhagat Kabir found in the Guru Granth Sahib: [9]

The battle-drum beats in the sky of the mind; aim is taken, and the wound is inflicted. The spiritual warriors enter the field of battle; now is the time to fight! He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defense of religion. He may be cut apart, piece by piece, but he never leaves the field of battle.

The paradoxical Sant Sipahi, therefore, signifies a paradoxical concept. However, there is little theoretical study of how this conjunction plays itself out in contemporary Sikh politics.

## Cross-References

- [Khalsa](#)
- [Sant\(s\)](#)
- [Sikhism](#)
- [Violence \(and Nonviolence\), Sikhism](#)

## References

1. McLeod WH (1995) Historical dictionary of Sikhism. Scarecrow, Lanham
2. Cynthia MK (1996) Why Sikhs fight. Anthropological contributions to conflict resolution. University of Georgia, Athens, pp 11–30
3. Nesbitt E (2000) Religión and the body. In: Sarah Coakley (ed) Cambridge University Press

4. Owen Cole W, Sambhi PS (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon, London
5. Daljeet S (1998) Essentials of Sikhism. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
6. McLeod WH (2003) Sikhs of the Khalsa: a history of the Khalsa Rahit. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
7. Pettigrew J. Songs of the Sikh resistance movement
8. Owen Cole W, Sambhi PS (1995) The Sikhs: their religious beliefs and practices. Sussex Academic, Brighton
9. Simha T (1977) The turban and the sword of the Sikhs. Sikh Missionary Society, Gravesend
10. [http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WhgDL6SwGeQC&oi=fnd&pg=PA310&dq=sant+sipahi&ots=BNGE77JyXC&sig=xdYviL0ohMYIADI8f4Kqz\\_Jloq0#v=onepage&q=sipahi&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WhgDL6SwGeQC&oi=fnd&pg=PA310&dq=sant+sipahi&ots=BNGE77JyXC&sig=xdYviL0ohMYIADI8f4Kqz_Jloq0#v=onepage&q=sipahi&f=false)
11. <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=521m3YG-N38C&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=sant+sipahi&ots=NxjG7XPiGj&sig=JzAZGRFtUTfDR10dFUtA0EA3aQ#v=onepage&q=sant%20sipahi&f=false>
12. [http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bk-rDk\\_OyvWC&oi=fnd&pg=PA289&dq=sant+sipahi&ots=cqGdD5d9hH&sig=gIRNKMTSeq\\_K2hIkWnM8ypIg76l#v=onepage&q=sant%20sipahi&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bk-rDk_OyvWC&oi=fnd&pg=PA289&dq=sant+sipahi&ots=cqGdD5d9hH&sig=gIRNKMTSeq_K2hIkWnM8ypIg76l#v=onepage&q=sant%20sipahi&f=false)
13. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17448720903408307>
14. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/834379>
15. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17448727.2011.561611>
16. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15027570.2011.562026>

## Sant(s)

Susan Prill

Department of Religious Studies, Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA, USA

## Synonyms

[Bhagats](#); [Nirgun Bhakti](#)

## Definition

Derived from the Sanskrit root *sat* (Truth), *Sant* is used in North Indian languages to denote a devotee or saintly person. In modern usage, it most often refers to poet-saints from North and Central India who conceived of the Divine as *nirguna* (abstract or formless).

## Sants and Sant Teachings

The Maharashtrian Sant movement (fl. thirteenth to eighteenth centuries) and the Northern Sant tradition (fl. fifteenth to seventeenth centuries) are understood as subgroups of the *bhakti* (devotion) movement. The term is also applied to modern charismatic leaders in Sikhism. The word Sant is often translated as “Saint,” but the two words are not etymologically related.

The Sants are associated most strongly with their praises sung to a formless divinity. This form of devotion is known as *nirguna bhakti* (devotion to something without qualities). The idea of a formless divinity can be traced to the concept of Brahman in the Upanishads, and this idea may also have been reinforced in some areas by Islam. Unlike *saguna bhakti* (devotion to something with qualities), which often refers to the physical form of a deity, *nirguna bhakti* attempts to form a personal relationship with an impersonal God. Many Sants correlate this idea with an assertion that the various names of God proposed by Hindu and Muslim traditions ultimately refer to the same concept. The most widely used name for this divinity in most Sant literature is Ram (not understood to be the same as the Hindu hero-god of the same name), and other Vaishnava (Vishnu-worshipping) names like Hari are also commonly employed. Some of the earliest Sants, such as the Maharashtrian saint Namdev, also composed *saguna* Vaishnava hymns, but the later Sants, like Kabir, were exclusively *nirguna* in outlook.

The strongest historical influence on Sant teachings as they developed was undoubtedly Vaishnava *bhakti*. The *bhakti* movement originated in southern India in the seventh century, and by the thirteenth century there were a number of *bhakti* poets in Maharashtra. From Maharashtra, *bhakti* moved north into Hindi-speaking areas. *Bhakti* poems appear to have been spread by itinerant musicians far beyond the regions in which they were initially composed. Several ideals of the *bhakti* movement found their way into the compositions of the Sants, including a rejection of Brahmanical ritual in favor of a personal devotion, the ideal of *viraha* or longing

in separation, and the use of romantic/sexual imagery to portray the relationship between devotee and divinity. Many Vaishnava compendia of the lives of saints include Sants in them, but it is important to note that Sants did not consider themselves to be part of conventional Vaishnava Hinduism. [1]

Additionally, the Nath Yogi movement associated with Gorakhnath/Gorakshanatha appears to have been a strong influence on some Sants, especially the North Indian Sant Kabir. [18] The Yogic concepts of a subtle body and of an “unstruck sound” which might be heard during meditation find their way into a number of Sant compositions. Yogic influence is also found in Maharashtrian Sant poetry, and the Maharashtrian hagiographical tradition asserts ties to a number of prominent Yogis.

Sufi poetry in India often bears a strong resemblance to Hindu *bhakti* poetry and literary tropes in each seem to have influenced the other. Some aspects of Sufi thinking certainly impacted Sants, especially in the North. ([5], pp. 202–203) In addition, the Muslim emphasis on one formless God may very well have reinforced indigenous sources for *nirguna* conceptions of the divine.

In addition to *nirguna bhakti*, one of the typical qualities of Sant poetry is a rejection of caste hierarchy and external representations of religiosity [9, pp. 20–21]. This often takes the form of an equating of certain aspects of Hindu and Muslim practice, with the assertion that both are futile. An illustrative poem by Kabir reads in part “If caste was what the Creator had in mind,/why wasn’t anyone born/with Siva’s three-lined sign?/. . . If you’re a Muslim,/from a Muslim woman born,/why weren’t you circumcised inside?”. (*KG pad 182*) ([6], p. 54)

Hymns such as these have led to a common popular understanding of the Sants as social reformers. The poems of Kabir, Namdev, and Raidas are thus frequently cited by low caste and “untouchable” groups and by politicians and others who want to reduce interreligious tensions.

## A History of the Sants

As mentioned above, there are two main “schools” of Sant poetry – one in Maharashtra,

and the other in the north of India, centered in what is now Uttar Pradesh, but stretching into Punjab and Rajasthan [16, p. 22]. The former is primarily Vaishnava in outlook, with some nirgun influences, while the latter is more exclusive in its nirgun outlook. The Maharashtrian Sant Namdev is said to have travelled to the north as far as the Punjab and thus serves as a putative link between Maharashtrian and Northern Sant schools.

The Maharashtrian Sant movement appears to have grown out of Vaishnava devotionism. The Maharashtrian Sants are today associated with the Varkari movement, a Vaishnava cult centered on Vitthal, a regional manifestation of Krishna/Vishnu. Maharashtrian Sant compositions often blur lines between Shaiva and Vaishnava devotionism and in some cases show clear influence from Nath Yogi thinking. [17] Prominent Maharashtrian Sants include the thirteenth or fourteenth century saints Jnanadev and Namdev, together with the latter's maidservant Janabai, and the sixteenth to seventeenth century saints Tukaram and Eknath, as well as Tukaram's female disciple Bahinabai. [13]

Northern Sants are sometimes said to trace a lineage to the fourteenth century Vaishnava saint Ramanand. Ramanand was a Brahmin, though, and this "lineage" may partially be an attempt to legitimize religious compositions by low caste and "untouchable" saints like Kabir and Raidas/Ravidas [7, pp. 43-4, 14, p. 5]. It is quite common to find lists of Sant precursors in the compositions of Northern Sants, and this has helped to shape the idea that they form a cohesive group. This group includes Kabir (a weaver), Raidas (a leather-worker), Pipa (King of Gagaraunagadh), Sen (a barber) and the Rajasthani Sant Dhanna.

Additionally, Dadu Dayal (c. 1544–1604) was a Sant who was geographically centered in what is now Rajasthan. The Dadu Panth sect which grew from his teachings anthologized the compositions of several Sants, including Kabir, Raidas, and Namdev. [12] This corpus has been the focus of much research by Winand Callewaert. [3,4]

Guru Nanak (1469–1539), first Guru of the Sikh religion, composed hymns which have much in common with Sant ideology. He is not

generally listed as a Sant, but some of his compositions are found in anthologies of Sant writing from outside of the Sikh tradition. [2] As the Sikh holy text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, was compiled in the early seventeenth century, it included those precursors of Guru Nanak who were understood to be consistent with his teachings. These precursors are referred to as *bhagat*, a regional variation on the term *bhakta*, or practitioner of bhakti. Many of the better-known Sants are included in this list. The bhagats included in the *Guru Granth Sahib* are Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Sheikh Farid, Sadhna, Surdas, Sain, Jaidev, Trilochan, Dhanna, Parmanand, Pipa, Beni, Bhikhan, and Ramanand. Although most of these are Sants, some are associated with other traditions. Most notably, Sheikh Farid was a Sufi Muslim. [15]

### Sources for Sant Compositions and Hagiography

The compositions of the various Sants, first transmitted orally, have been committed to writing in sectarian anthologies, beginning in the sixteenth century. It should also be mentioned that prominent Sants such as Kabir and Raidas also have a strong oral tradition today, and many compositions which are associated in the popular imagination with these Sants may not be traceable to the earliest manuscript collections [10, pp. 205-223]. This is complicated somewhat by the Indian tradition of honoring a saintly figure by composing hymns in his/her name. A poem attributed to Namdev might thus have been composed in the nineteenth century.

The main historical manuscript traditions for Northern Sants are (1) the *Guru Granth Sahib*, with the relevant compositions being anthologized by 1604; (2) Rajasthani manuscripts associated with the Dadu Panth, most notably the *Panc-Vani* and the *Sarvangis* of Gopaldas and Rajab; and (3) The *Bijak* of Kabir, associated with the Kabir Panth. There are a number of hagiographical texts as well, including the sixteenth century *Paracai* of Anantadas and Nabhadās' *Bhaktamal* (probably early seventeenth century).



Sources for Maharashtrian Santism include a number of texts attributed to Jnanadev, most significantly the *Amritanubhava* and the lengthy commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* known as the *Jñanesvari*. Most of the Maharashtrian Sants composed devotional hymns known as *abhangas*, and these are found both in the oral tradition and in a number of manuscripts. In addition, there are a number of hagiographical texts, most significantly the *Bhakta Vijaya* and *Bhakti Lilamrit* of Mahipati (eighteenth century).

## Sants in Modern Sikhism

Finally, it should be noted that the term Sant is commonly used in the modern Sikh tradition to refer to contemporary charismatic leaders. This modern usage has little, if any, overlap with the usage described above. Sikh Sants may have anywhere from a handful to many thousands of followers and operate as charismatic religious teachers, much like modern Hindu gurus. Some Sikh Sants do offer messages of social reform that overlap with messages found in the compositions of Ravidas or Kabir, but these are not central to Sikh Santhood. [11]

## Cross-References

- [Bhakti \(bhagti\)](#)
- [Kabir](#)
- [Namdev](#)
- [Ravidas \(Raidas\)](#)

## References

1. Barthwal PD (1936) The Nirguna school of Hindi poetry: an exposition of medieval Santa mysticism. Indian Book Shop, Benares
2. Callewaert WM (2006) Padas of Guru Nanak in Rajasthani manuscripts. In: Horstmann M (ed) *Bhakti in current research*. Manohar, New Delhi
3. Callewaert WM, Friedlander PG (1992) The life and works of Raidas. Manohar, New Delhi
4. Callewaert WM, Lath M (1989) The Hindi Padavali of Namdev: a critical edition of Namdev's Hindi songs with translation and annotation. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi

5. Gold D (1987) The Lord as guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian tradition. Oxford University Press, New York
6. Hawley JS (2005) Three Bhakti voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in their times and ours. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
7. Hawley JS, Juergensmeyer M (1988) Songs of the saints of India. Oxford University Press, New York
8. Hess L, Singh S (2002) The Bijak of Kabir. Oxford University Press, Oxford
9. Lorenzen DN (1995) The historical vicissitudes on the Bhakti religion. In: Lorenzen DN (ed) *Bhakti religion in North India: community identity and political action*. SUNY Press, Albany
10. Lorenzen DN (1996) Praises to a formless God: Nirguni texts from north India. Sri Satguru Publications, New Delhi
11. McLeod WH (1987) The meaning of 'Sant' in Sikh usage. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
12. Orr WG (1947) A sixteenth-century Indian mystic. Lutterworth Press, London
13. Ranade RD (1933) Mysticism in Maharashtra: Indian mysticism. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. Reprinted 1982
14. Schomer K (1987) Introduction: the Sant tradition in perspective. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
15. Singh P (2003) The bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh self-definition and the bhagat bani. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
16. Vaudeville C (1987) Sant Mat: Santism as the universal path to sanctity. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
17. Vaudeville C (1987) The Shaiva-Vaishnava synthesis in Maharashtrian Santism. In: Schomer K, McLeod WH (eds) *The Sants: studies in a devotional tradition of India*, Berkeley Religious Studies series. Motilal Banarsidass, Berkeley
18. Vaudeville C (1993) A weaver named Kabir: selected verses with a detailed biographical and historical introduction. Oxford University Press, New Delhi

---

## Sants

- [SECTS \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Sapna

- [Dreams \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Savant

► [Ramdas \(Guru\)](#)

---

## Scripture (Sikhism)

Pashaura Singh  
Department of Religious Studies,  
University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

## Synonyms

[Guru Granth Sahib](#)

## Definition

The notion of sacred scripture in Sikhism.

## Scripture as Guru

The study of the Sikh scripture is quite useful in understanding the general notion of “scripture” as a cross-cultural phenomenon. In fact, the study of a text as scripture is not only concerned with its textual problems, the reconstruction of its history, the formation of the canon, and its contextual meaning but also with its ongoing role in the cumulative tradition of a religious community, both as a normative source of authority and as a prodigious living force. ([2], p. 659) Perceived from this angle, the reception of the Sikh scripture as Guru by the Sikh community is highly significant. The tenth and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), terminated the line of personal Gurus before he passed away in 1708 and installed the Adi Granth as “the eternal Guru for the Sikhs,” making it the source of spiritual benefits and the central focus of Sikh worship. Thus, the Guru Granth Sahib became a perennial source of divine guidance for Sikhs, and as a mark of respect for its revered status, they never open it without first ceremonially waving over it a *chauri*

(“whisk”) made of yak hair or man-made fiber fixed in a silver metal and attached to a wooden handle.

In his seminal work on the comparative understanding of the phenomenon of “scripture,” Wilfred Cantwell Smith has proposed a radical thesis that no text is a scripture in itself. People – a given community – make a text into scripture by treating it in a certain way. Accordingly, *scripture is a human activity*. ([3], p. 18) That is, scripture becomes scripture only when it is filtered through the collective consciousness and experience of a people. In this sense, a scripture is a relational concept: it points to a relationship of power between a text and a community. A scripture is not only set apart from other texts by a community because of its richness or semantic density, but because it is inextricably embedded in ritual and daily life. As such, a living relationship with a scripture is not merely to read it, nor even to understand its verbal meaning, but to appropriate, to interiorize, to practice its precepts, and to strive to realize its truth.

The daily routine of a devout Sikh begins with the practice of meditation on the divine name. This occurs during the “ambrosial hours” (*amritvela*) in the morning, immediately after rising and bathing. The meditation is followed by the recitation of five liturgical prayers, which include Guru Nanak’s *Japji* (“recitation”). Similarly, a collection of hymns, *Sodar Rahiras* (“Supplication at That Door”), is prescribed for the evening prayers, and the *Kirtan Sohila* (“Song of Praise”) is recited before retiring for the night. These prayers are learnt by heart in childhood, and later on, they are recited as part of daily routine from memory. In a gurdwara, the main focus is on the Guru Granth Sahib, installed ceremoniously every morning. Worship consists mainly of the singing of scriptural passages set to music, with the accompaniment of instruments. Professional and amateur *ragis* (Sikh musicians) lead the congregation in devotional singing. Indeed, the singing of hymns (*kirtan*) in a congregational setting is the heart of the Sikh devotional experience. Through such *kirtan*, the devotees attune themselves to vibrate in harmony with the divine word, which has the power to transform and unify their consciousness.

The most significant point in the Sikh experience of accepting the Adi Granth as living Guru may be seen in the practice of “taking the Guru’s Word” (*vak laina*). The procedure functions in a liturgical fashion of opening the scripture at random. During the process, the first hymn at the top of the left-hand page (or when a hymn begins on the preceding page as is usually the case, one turns back to its actual beginning) is read aloud as the proclamation of the Guru’s *Vak* (“saying”) for that particular moment or situation in life. It is then appropriated by the audience through “hearing.” In the case of individual early morning prayers, the whole family gathers in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib to receive the divine command that serves as an order of the day. This *Vak* becomes the inspiration for personal meditation throughout the day. Again, during evening prayers, one takes the *Vak* to conclude the day with its particular joys and sorrows. Similarly in the corporate setting, the whole congregation receives the *Vak* as a divine command at the conclusion of different ceremonies. ([1], p. 272)

Basically, scriptural traditions perform their texts in ritual activities. In the Sikh tradition, for instance, lifecycle rituals are inseparably connected to the text of the scripture. The performance of ritual is indeed the performance of text. That is, the central feature of the key lifecycle rituals is always the Guru Granth Sahib. When a child is to be named, the family takes the baby to the gurdwara and offers *karah prashad* (sweet porridge), sanctified food made of flour, sugar, butter, and water and prepared in a large iron dish. After offering thanks and prayers through *Ardas* (petition), the Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random, and a name is chosen beginning with the same letter as the first composition on the left-hand page. Thus, the process of seeking guidance from the sacred word functions to provide the first letter of the chosen name. The underlying principle is that the child derives his or her identity from the Guru’s word and begins life as a Sikh. To a boy’s name, the common surname *Singh* (lion) is added, and to a girl’s name, *Kaur* (princess) is added at the end of the chosen name. In addition, the infant is administered sweetened water that is

stirred with a sword, and the first five stanzas of Guru Nanak’s *Japji* are recited.

A Sikh wedding, according to the *Anand* (bliss) rite, takes place in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, and the performance of the actual marriage requires the couple to circumambulate the sacred scripture four times to take four vows. Before the bridegroom and the bride make each round, they listen to a verse of the “wedding hymn” by the fourth Guru, Ram Das (1534–1581), being read by a scriptural reader. Then, they bow before the Guru Granth Sahib and get up to make the round while the professional musicians sing the same verse with the congregation. During the process of their clockwise movement around the scripture four times, they take the following four vows: (1) to lead an action-oriented life based on righteousness and to never shun obligations of family and society, (2) to maintain a bond of reverence and dignity between them, (3) to keep enthusiasm for life alive in the face of adverse circumstances and to remain detached from worldly attachments, and (4) to cultivate a “balanced approach” in life, avoiding all extremes. The pattern of circumambulation in the *Anand* marriage ceremony is the reactualization of the primordial movement of life in which there is no beginning and no end. In fact, the memory of four marital vows internalizes the Sikh tradition’s goal for the couple to lead a blissful life.

The key initiation ceremony (*Amrit Sanskar*) for a Sikh must take place in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. There is no fixed age for initiation, which may be done at any time the person is willing to accept the Khalsa discipline. Five Khalsa Sikhs, representing the collectivity of the original Cherished Five (*Panj Pyare*), conduct the ceremony. Each recites from memory one of the five liturgical prayers while stirring the sweetened water (*amrit*) with a double-edged sword. The novice then drinks the *amrit* five times so that his body is purified from the influence of five vices, and five times the *amrit* is sprinkled on his eyes to transform his outlook toward life. Finally, the *amrit* is poured on his head five times to sanctify his hair so that he will preserve his natural form and listen to the voice of conscience. Throughout the procedure, the Sikh being

initiated formally takes the oath each time by repeating the following declaration: *Vahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa! Vahiguru Ji Ki Fateh!* (“Khalsa belongs to the Wonderful Lord! Victory belongs to the Wonderful Lord!”). Thus, a person becomes a Khalsa Sikh through the transforming power of the sacred word. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a *Vak* is read aloud, and *karah prashad* is distributed.

At the time of death, both in the period preceding the cremation and in the post-cremation rites, hymns from the *Guru Granth Sahib* are sung. In addition, a reading of the entire scripture takes place at home or in a *gurdwara*. At the conclusion of the reading within 10 days, a *bhog* (“completion”) ceremony takes place when the final prayers are offered in the memory of the deceased.

Here, it will be instructive to closely look at the daily installation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* early in the morning at the *Darbar Sahib* (Golden Temple) at Amritsar. This is a truly fascinating activity that can be viewed from the live broadcast by *ETC Channel Punjabi* on Zee TV through Dish Network. The sacred volume is carried in a golden palanquin (*palaki*) in a procession from the Akal Takht (“Throne of the Timeless One”) to the Golden Temple, beginning with the beat of a large drum, *nagara*, and occasionally blowing of a *narsinga* (a huge horn-like brass instrument) to invoke the sacred symbols of power. Thousands of chanting Sikhs participate in this early morning service, some greeting the scriptural *Guru* with affectionate reverence by showering flower petals on it, while others jostling for opportunities to carry the heavy palanquin but often eager to encourage the visitors to take a turn in what is called *palki seva* or palanquin service. The high point of this devotional activity comes when the scripture is majestically installed on a lectern (*manji sahib*) under a canopy inside the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple to the accompaniment of the recitation of “Panegyrics of the Bards” (*bhattan de savayye*) by a group of Sikhs, and it is then opened at random by the *granthi* (reader) to proclaim the *Guru’s Word* that is received by the audience as the divine command for the day. Each one of the Sikh devotees derives from the same hymn a message suitable to one’s level and degree of understanding.

The sacred sound of scriptural words is highly esteemed in the Sikh tradition. The vocalizing of Sikh scriptures is thought to have transformative power only when enunciated exactly in the way of the Sikh *Gurus*, which is achieved through devotional singing. The distinctive aesthetic, oral experience of Sikh scriptures includes recitation, devotional singing, and oral exegesis. There is thus a rich tradition of oral/aural experience of Sikh scripture. Each individual Sikh tries to understand the meaning of life in the light of one’s daily experience of immersing oneself in *gurbani* (inspired utterances of the *Guru*). Indeed, Sikhs firmly believe that the eternal *Guru* is disclosed in the performance of a memorized text.

In sum, the Sikh scripture implicitly challenges analytic dichotomies that rigidly oppose oral and written texts, or sound and meaning, or that which foresees an inevitable evolutionary movement between them. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is foundational to the most important Sikh doctrines, rituals, and social and ethical positions. It thus provides the authoritative basis of Sikh traditions that might otherwise seem incomprehensible, or even groundless. To be in the sheer presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* makes the Sikhs feel that they are on sacred ground. As the ultimate *Guru*, the Sikh scripture is understood to perform the cohesive role of community preservation.

## Cross-References

- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gurbani Kirtan](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Ritual \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [The Adi Granth](#)

## References

1. Singh P (2000) *The Guru Granth Sahib: canon, meaning and authority*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
2. Singh P (2008) Scripture as guru in the Sikh tradition. *Relig Compass* 2(4):659–673
3. Smith WC (1993) *What is scripture? A comparative approach*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis

## Seasons

► [Calendar \(Nanakshahi\), Sikhism](#)

## SECTS (Sikhism)

Opinderjit Kaur Takhar  
Department of Religious Studies, University of  
Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK

## Synonyms

[Bhagats](#); [Divisions](#); [Groups](#); [Sants](#)

## Definition

Divisions and factions based on differences within a religious group.

## Diversity among Sikhs

Analogous to all major world faiths, Sikhism is not monolithic. The diversity in beliefs and practices amongst “Sikhs” raises much heated debate amongst those who are reluctant to accept that the *Panth* (the global Sikh community) is far from homogenous. This very often divides Sikh consensus over the divisions so evidently present within the *Panth*. Immediately, then one is confronted with the task of defining what is mainstream, and what is a sect. There are a number of issues associated with utilizing the term ‘orthodox’ within the Sikh context. Strictly speaking, this term becomes invalid in light of Sikh teachings. Nevertheless, it is used, albeit inappropriately, in popular discourse amongst Sikhs when referring to initiated and uninitiated members of the *Panth*. Guru Nanak, strictly speaking, very often spoke out against the positions of supremacy and orthodoxy assumed by the priestly classes in the socio-milieu of the fifteenth century. He vehemently criticized the position of the *brahmins* (the

priests) within Indian society (Adi Granth verse 747). In emphasizing the concept of immanence which entailed that all human beings are equal, it is highly likely therefore that Guru Nanak would object to levels of conformity in which the ordained assumed top position. This is indeed relatively clear when one bears in mind that Sikhism lacks a priesthood. Each individual has equal access to the Divine. However, over time, it is This Sikhs who have taken initiation into the *Khalsa* and have become *amritdhari* who have come to assume positions of authority within the *Panth*. [1] This led to a the discourse surrounding Sikh identity is one that has been topical for decades. One issue is whether uninitiated followers of Sikh teachings should be defined as Sikh at all in light of their reluctance to becoming initiated members of the *Khalsa*. Sikhs who cut their hair (*sahajdhari*s) would object to being labelled as a sect. Then there are those Sikhs who, although keeping the outward form of the *Khalsa* (particularly the uncut hair, the *kesdhari*s), do not take initiation into the *Khalsa*. [2] The *kesdhari*s who are not *amritdhari* represent a majority in the *Panth*. Are they a sect?

Despite Guru Nanak’s refusal to wear a symbol that signified his spiritual rebirth, the wearing of symbols associated with the *Khalsa* is the yardstick by which the *Tat Khalsa* defined the ‘true’ Sikh in the late nineteenth century. [3] Sikhs who deviate from the “norm” such as continuing the line of human Gurus, denying Guru status to the *Adi Granth*, are regarded as sects, but Sikhs nevertheless. The *Namdharis* are a prime example here due to their continuation of the line of human Gurus from Guru Gobind Singh to the present day. However, their stringent obedience of the *Khalsa* form cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, there are sects such as the western Sikh converts who identify with the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. These non-Punjabi Sikhs would strongly expostulate being labelled as a sect. They are stringent *Khalsa* observers and do not continue the line of human Gurus. In which case, they appear less heretic in praxis than the *Namdharis*, for example. Is it the emphasis on *kundalini yoga* or is it their non-Punjabi ethnicity that brings their Sikh identity into question?



The teachings of the Radha Soami *Sants* aim to encourage peaceful living through meditation. The following claims to be available to people of all faiths without any notion of being labelled a sect. Does this mean then that one can be a Sikh, a Hindu, or a Muslim and merely follow the advice of these *Sants* without any implications upon their religious identity? Another sect which claims to be a “mission” in order to bring people closer to the formless Divine that is imminent within all is the Nirankaris. Guru Nanak emphasized interiorized religion by meditation on the Name of God. This would imply that following the teachings of Guru Nanak, without taking initiation into the *Khalsa*, is again a deviation from what has become labelled as ‘proper Sikhi’. A number of sects have arisen purposely in order to blatantly stress their distinction from the *Panth*. Although issues of caste discrimination have entailed that such sects as the Ravidassias and Valmikis are currently actively seeking to sever links with any association with a Sikh identity, it is not so clear-cut when addressing the *kesdharis* within both communities. The whole issue of Sikh identity is much debated amongst Sikhs and non-Sikhs. It is difficult to cite one definition that would encompass all Sikhs. [1] This would indeed suggest that when addressing diversity within the *Panth*, it is more appropriate to discuss many different *sampradayas*, variations of Sikh belief and practice. After all, this would more readily accommodate the many *Sants*, *Babas*, and Gurus who have their disparate followings. This would also alleviate, maybe, the derogatory connotations of being labelled as a “sect” of Sikhism.

## Namdharis

The Namdharis, also known as the *Kukas* (from the term *kuk* to shriek), are indeed regarded as a sect within the *Panth*, but “Sikh” nevertheless. [1] The term Namdhari is translated as “one who has the Name of God imbued in the heart.” Thus, the Namdharis place great importance on the practice of *naam simran* (meditation on the Name of God). However, it is the continuation of human

Gurus, to the line of human succession from Guru Gobind Singh, which brings the Sikh identity of the Namdharis into question. The Namdharis reject the traditional Sikh belief that Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed the *Adi Granth* as the *Guru Granth Sahib* prior to his death in 1708 B.C.E. [4] They adamantly affirm that Guru Gobind Singh lived his later life, from 1708 B.C.E. until his death in 1812 B.C.E., as Ajapal Singh. [5] Importantly, however, the Namdharis are stringent *Khalsa* observers and are recognizable by their white horizontally tied turbans. The majority of Namdharis do not wear the *kirpan* (the sword/dagger which is one of the five symbols of the *Khalsa*). Namdharis mold their difference from the *Panth* by consciously promoting their traditionalist continuation of Sikh practices. Hence, their justification for continuing the line of human Gurus (and thus consequently refusing to give Guru status to the *Adi Granth*) is to follow convention from the period of Guru Arjan where both human Guru and scripturally contained spiritual teachings guided the *Panth*. Hence, the Namdhari Gurus are the human successors of Guru Gobind Singh. The tradition of human Gurus continues to the present day with Satguru Jagjit Singh as the present leader of the Namdharis worldwide.

According to the Namdharis, Guru Gobind Singh acted out his death at Nanded in order to deceit his enemies into believing he was no longer an influence on the continually growing Sikh *Panth*. [6] He also changed his name to Ajapal Singh. Although this appears somewhat out of character for Guru Gobind Singh who proclaimed the bravery of the *Sant Sipahi* (Saint-Soldier) of the *Khalsa*, it is nonetheless inexorably an important marker in the origins of the distinct nature of the Namdhari community. Prior to this death in 1812 B.C.E., Kukas believe that Ajapal Singh chose an *arora*, Balak Singh as his successor. [7] Balak Singh promoted simplicity and *naam simran* at a time when the *Panth* was less than stringently yielding to the non-ritualistic philosophy of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Balak Singh was succeeded by the most famous of all Namdhari Gurus, Ram Singh, who became the twelfth human Sikh Guru. [8] Namdharis believe that

Guru Ram Singh is the reincarnation of Guru Gobind Singh himself. Ram Singh revived the *Panth* by creating the *Sant Khalsa* on 12 April 1857. Led by Guru Ram Singh, the Namdharis are passionately acknowledged by the *Panth*, as a whole, for their sincere contribution towards their peaceful struggle for India's independence. [9] Bhaini Sahib in Ludhiana district which was the birthplace of Guru Ram Singh remains the headquarters of the Namdhari community.

The humble origins and subsequent development of the Namdhari community appealed to the poorer Punjabis of the nineteenth century. Ram Singh's struggle for political as well as spiritual freedom further endorsed the strict principles of *Khalsa* observance, more specifically the principles of the *Sant Khalsa* created in 1857 at Bhaini Sahib. [10] Ram Singh emphasized the importance of truthful living through a hardworking, simple, and nonviolent lifestyle. Kukas believe that prior to the creation of the *Sant Khalsa* in 1857, initiation into the *Khalsa* was not openly available to females. Thus, according to the Namdharis, it was after 1857 that masses of women became initiated into the Namdhari way of life. The *Rahit* (code of living) of the *Sant Khalsa* differs in a number of ways to that of the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* authorized by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The Namdhari *Rahit* requires all Kukas to wear a white *mala* (rosary beads) with 108 knots. [11] Since the wearing of the *kirpan* had been banned by the British government, Namdharis to the present day wear a *lathi* (small axe) instead. Further distinctions from the *Panth* were made through the hoisting of a white triangular *nishan sahib* of the Kukas.

Guru Ram Singh's struggle for Indian independence mounted into a strict surveillance of him by the British. In March 1872, he was exiled to prison in Rangoon, Burma. Through prison, the Namdharis maintain that Ram Singh sent out secret *hukamnamas* (daily orders) to his followers. According to government records, Guru Ram Singh passed away in prison on 29 November 1885 due to a serious bout of diarrhea. [1] The Namdharis however refuse to believe this. They maintain that Namdhari prophecies (*sakhis*)

allude to the belief that Guru Ram Singh will live until the age of 250. Ram Singh's brother Guru Hari Singh thus became the deputy Guru, looking after the *gaddi* until Guru Ram Singh returns from exile to be amongst his followers. He was in turn succeeded by his son, Guru Partap Singh. At present, the *gaddi* at Bhaini Sahib is occupied by Satguru Jagjit Singh, one of the sons of Guru Partap Singh.

A distinctive ritual amongst the Namdharis is that of *havan* (the fire ceremony). In keeping with tradition, the *havan* is performed before all major celebrations. It replaces the function of the *akhand path* (continuous 48 h reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib*) practiced by Sikhs generally. Namdhari weddings also take place by the couple taking their four *lavan* around the *havan* and not the *Adi Granth*.

The *darshan* of Satguru Jagjit Singh, the *deh-dhari* (living human Guru), is considered an act of great merit for the Namdharis. Although his permanent residence remains at Bhaini Sahib, he regularly travels to the Namdhari Sangat across the globe. It is his picture, when not present in person, that takes the position that the *Guru Granth Sahib* would in Gurdwaras of the general *Panth*. Namdhari places of worship are referred to as a *dharamsala*. Hence, it is the overt and blatant rejection of the *Adi Granth* as Guru, and subsequently the continuation of human successors of Guru Gobind Singh, that causes the Namdharis to be viewed as heretics by a substantial number of Sikhs.

## Nirankaris

Another sect that formed as a result of endeavors to rescue the *Panth* from the temptations of the economic glories under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule was that of the Nirankari movement of the 1850s. The movement was started by a contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Baba Dayal (1783–1855). Dayal was perplexed by the Hindu rituals that had crept into the *Panth*, in particular the extent of idol worshipping. Thus, he emphasized the *nirguna*, or rather the *nirankar* aspect of the Divine. This was a teaching central to the

religious philosophy of Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus. [12] Dayal endeavored to promote the ideals of *nirankar* through his emphasis on the practice of *nam simran*, meditation on the Name (rather than the form) of God. Hence, the following was given the name “Nirankaris” through its formation at Rawalpindi in 1851.

In a similar fashion to the efforts of Guru Ram Singh of the Namdhari tradition, Dayal also emphasized simplicity in the lives of the Sikhs. Far too much lavish pompousness had occupied both the Sikh’s social and religious engagements. *Brahmins* were being consulted for daily rituals, and many Sikhs had lost the essence of Guru Nanak’s emphasis that he placed on moving away from ritual-based religion. [13] Baba Dayal emphasized Guru Nanak’s teachings about the immanence of God and thus promoted that all beings were equal, regardless of caste, gender, or creed. [14] The life of the householder as opposed to the renouncer of worldly attachments was the ideal according to the Nirankaris. Hence, the emphasis was placed on Baba Dayal’s “mission” rather than the establishment of a new sect or faith.

The Nirankaris are renowned for the standardization of Sikh life cycle rites by ensuring that the *Guru Granth Sahib* was used as the focus. Baba Dayal, although emphasizing interiorized religion to the *nirankar*, placed no insistence on adopting the *Khalsa* form. Similar to the majority of his followers, he too was a *sahajdhari* Sikh. Thus, the *Asali* Nirankaris, the “true” Nirankaris (since they too faced a number of schisms over time), are often labelled as a Nanak-Panth since it is the teachings of Guru Nanak that are emphasized without reference to the insistence on the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh. So should the Nirankaris be discussed as a Sikh sect on the basis that they do not enforce the *Khalsa* form as the ideal? On what lines do they deviate, if any, from the ‘mainstream’ *Panth* (and, indeed, if such a distinction is applicable)? Importantly, during the Singh Sabha reforms, the Nirankaris were numbered amongst the Sanatan Sikhs as opposed to the Tat Khalsa. A point of defiance however is probably attributed to the fact that Nirankaris, although acknowledging the ten Sikh Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib*, also lay importance on the tradition of furthering

the continuation of Gurus from Baba Dayal. A unique practice that takes place amongst the Nirankaris is bowing to each other’s feet and referring to the other as “Maha Pursh,” thus further strengthening Dayal’s emphasis on the immanence of the Divine in all human beings. According to Baba Dayal, “Nirankar is God and one who realises Him is a Nirankari.”

## Radha Soami Satsang

A movement that raises further questions in terms of its Sikh orientation is that of the Radha Soami Satsang. Moreover, it perplexes scholars and the lay person alike as to what extent it can be regarded as a sect *within* Sikhism. This is partly due to the lack of overt references to Sikh teachings in the teachings of the Radha Soami *Sants*. Indeed, the movement is frequently referred to as a “guidance” towards realizing one’s true nature through retaining current religious affiliation. The Radha Soami movement is also referred to as the *Sant Mat*: “the teachings/path of the *Sants*.” The movement attaches great importance to vegetarianism and an alcohol-free lifestyle. It lays no emphasis on becoming *amritdhari*. Thus, for many *Khalsa* Sikhs, the Radha Soamis are viewed as a non-Sikh following. However, many of its eloquent Sikh following, particularly those associated with the Beas Satsang, would reject such notions. For such Sikhs, the Radha Soami *Sants*, through the emphasis on meditation, provide a spiritual and yogic element in order to fully appreciate the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

The origins of the Radha Soami sect are apprehended to Swami Shiv Dayal Singh from Agra who was regarded by his followers as a “true and perfect” *Sant*. According to the Radha Soamis, Dayal was following the same *Sant Mat* as that which attracted Guru Nanak’s attention. Is this suggesting therefore that Dayal is put on a par with Guru Nanak? The Sangat was established in Agra in 1861 with a majority of non-Sikh followers. The term “Radha” in this case refers to the collective soul, and “Soami” is a reference to the spiritual Master. Hence, the Radha Soami teachings, the *Sant Mat*, aim at guiding individual

souls towards a higher consciousness. [15] After Shiv Dayal's death, the movement resulted in many schisms across India, each with its own leader or Master. One such following was that of Shiv Dayal's widow, Radha. It is the Satsang at Beas through Baba Jaimal's following that continues to attract the highest number of Sikhs. The Satsang at Beas is also one of the most popular Radha Soami Deras globally.

The Radha Soami Masters insist that theirs is not a new path, not a new sect. Simply, it is portrayed as the essence of the path that was revealed to great *Sants* as Kabir, Tulsi, and Guru Nanak. [16] The Radha Soami Satsang makes it very clear that human Masters are vital in order for the masses to understand the *Sant Mat*. [17] The Radha Soami Masters, guide followers to benefit from *Surat Shabd Yoga*; this is "the practice of merging the soul in the divine current of the Supreme Being's melody and power". [18] Radha Soamis believe that their Masters are not confined to any religion, neither do they intend on starting new ones. The Masters give them a path to God realization without asking them to adopt a new religion. Thus, whether they can be regarded as a Sikh sect will continue to raise debate.

## Ravidassias

The very existence of *zat* (the Punjabi term for caste)-based sects or followings in the *Panth* gives rise to many debates about the presence of caste amongst the Sikhs. The following of Guru Ravidass highlights a number of pertinent issues in terms of whether the egalitarian principles of Sikh teachings are followed in actual practice by the Sikhs. [1] The promise of equality, based on the egalitarian hermeneutics of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, resulted in many of the lower castes becoming Sikhs. [19] One such mass conversion was by the former *chamars*, the leatherworkers. The term *Dalit* is preferred by the lower castes to truly represent their plight as the "crushed and oppressed." Currently, there is much dispute in terms of both religious and political identity amongst the followers of Guru

Ravidass. There may also be confusion as to why they are discussed as a sect amongst the Sikhs. According to the followers of Ravidass, their Guru was also from the *chamar zat*. [20] This is further supported by the inclusion of Ravidass's *bani* in the *Bhagat Bani*. The use of terminology is particularly important when discussing the following of Guru Ravidass. Generally the term Ravidassi indicates one who, although a Sikh, follows the teachings of Guru Ravidass in particular. For these Sikhs, Ravidass is more than a *Bhagat*; he is Guru. The term Ravidassia (officially proclaimed in January 2010) however is more political and adamantly endeavors to sever links from the *Panth*. Importantly, whichever term is employed, the spiritual emphasis tends to be on the forty-one hymns of Guru Ravidass (referred to as *Bhagat* by the *Panth* generally) presented within the *Bhagat Bani* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The events of 2009 in Vienna however, in which Sant Ramananda from the Ravidassia community was murdered, has raised important dialogues as to whether the *Guru Granth Sahib* should be removed from Ravidassia places of worship and be replaced by *Amritbani Sri Guru Ravidass*. [21] This would thus further alienate the place of worship from being referred to as a *Gurdwara*. Although importantly, the majority of Ravidassia places of worship are referred to as *Sabhas*.

It is the percentage of *kesdharis* amongst the Ravidassias who raise important considerations as to the extent of sectarian allegiance based on *zat*. Due to referring to Ravidass as Guru, he is explicitly put on a par with the ten human Gurus, to the extent that at times, he surpasses authority to be regarded as *the* Guru. This indeed is the cause of much tension and controversy amongst Ravidassias and Sikhs of other *zats*. [22] Increasingly, there is much political activity amongst Ravidassias to proclaim themselves as non-Sikhs, as a distinct religion with its caste Guru and his scripture, the *Amritbani Sri Guru Ravidass*. There are a number of practices amongst the Ravidassias that cause them to be seen as deviants by the *Panth*. [1] The constitutions of the various *Sabhas* make it clear that the religious focus of the community is to adhere to the principles emphasized through the

life and works of Guru Ravidass. There is no insistence to observe the Sikh *Rehat* characterizes the Ravidassia community.

## Valmikis

Another Punjabi *zat*-based following which merits discussion is that of the Valmikis, also referred to as the Balmikis. Similar to the position of allegiance as amongst the Ravidassias, members of this community also may object to being referred to as Sikhs at all. Nevertheless, again, it is the significant percentage of *kesdharis* amongst the Valmikis who warrant a mention. [1] Following the historical event of Guru Tegh Bahadur's severed head being brought to the child Gobind by a Rangretia (a low caste), Gobind spoke the words "*Rangretia Guru Ki Bete' the Rangretias are the children of my Lord*". [23] According to tradition, a large scale of lower castes, specifically the *chuhra*s (traditionally sweepers), became Sikhs. However, they were referred to as the *Adivasi Mazhabi* Sikhs, thus suggesting that the stigma of untouchability remained even after entering the apparently egalitarian *Panth*. [24] According to Valmikis, many of whom have Sikh connections, the promise of equality was not adhered to on a practical level by the non-Dalit Sikhs.

Valmikis take the alleged author of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* as their *zat* Guru in an endeavor to raise their social and religious position within Indian society at large. This however has raised much controversy from high caste Hindus who refuse to accept that Valmiki was from the *chuhra* *zat* or that alternatively it is the version of the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas that is authentic. [25] There are a number of features practiced amongst the wider Valmiki community that function to distinguish them from the general *Panth*. These distinctions are particularly significant to the Valmikis who are *kesdhari/amritdhari* or those who proclaim both a Sikh and Valmiki identity. For example, very rarely are Valmiki places of worship referred to as Gurdwaras, although a number house the *Guru Granth Sahib*. [1] On the whole however the majority of Valmiki Sabhas tend to house a Punjabi version of

the *Ramayana*; some also house the *Yoga Vasistha* which is a philosophical work attributed also to the sage Valmiki. [26] Valmikis refer to their Guru as *Jagat Guru Valmik Maharaj* "the Guru of the Universe." He is very often held higher than the Sikh Gurus. In a concerted effort to differentiate themselves from the *Panth*, the Valmiki community utilizes the symbol of the bow and arrow rather than the *Khanda*. [1] Seldom are the Sikh festivals or *gurpurbs* marked, except in communities where there is a significant number of *kesdharis/amritdharis*. Political pressure currently is very much towards *one* identity of the community as followers of Guru Valmiki – not Sikhs, not Hindus. However, in actual practice, the situation is far from unanimous.

## Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere

The sects or particular followings discussed so far have all been Punjabi in terms of ethnicity. However, increasingly there is an influx of non-Punjabis, referred to as *gora* Sikhs, to the *Panth*. Many non-Punjabi Sikhs would strongly object to their being collectively labelled to as a sect. Although membership of the *Khalsa Panth* is becoming increasingly attractive for non-Punjabis, it is particularly those non-Punjabi Sikhs who have been influenced by Harbhajan Singh Khalsa (1929–2004), also referred to as Yogi Bhajan, who are the focus of this section. [27] The specifically yogic branch of Bhajan's teachings is referred to as the 3HO sect "the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization". [1] At times, however, both terms for the organizations are used interchangeably, although the 3HO does not necessarily have a Sikh following. Sikhs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are stringent followers of the *Khalsa* form (the *bana*); both men and women wear the white turban. On converting to Sikhism, the non-Punjabis adopt traditional Sikh names with *Khalsa* as their surname. It is particularly in the United States of America that the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is most prominent. [28]

It was as a teacher of *kundalini yoga* from 1968 in America that Bhajan began attracting



Americans to his classes. This resulted in the official formation of the 3HO in 1969. Gradually, a number of his students began to express an interest in Sikhism. In 1971 Bhajan took a group of 84 of his yoga students to Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. The Sikh Dharma Brotherhood was officially registered in 1973. Bhajan emphasized that those students who were serious about following the Sikh way of life should become *amritdharis*. In terms of observance to the *Khalsa*, the non-Punjabi Sikhs, in this respect, most certainly fulfill the aspirations of the *Tat Khalsa*. Unlike the Namdharis, the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere attributes Guru status to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and Bhajan is not put on a par with the ten Sikh Gurus. However, it is the emphasis on *kundalini yoga* [29] that very often causes tension between Punjabi and non-Punjabi Sikhs, particularly those influenced by Bhajan. [30] There have been a number of heated incidences where Punjabi Sikhs have been accused of being “lapsed” towards the ideals promoted through *Sikhi*. [31] Other practices such as *white tantra* have also perplexed many Punjabi Sikhs. [29]

There are many additional “sects” to those mentioned here within Sikhism. Some such as the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha [1] display resentment to any suggestion that they are a sect within the *Panth*. This group has a strong tradition of following the teachings of *Sants* who are unique to the group. The *Sants* are put on a level of great importance but are not (in theory at least) put on a par with the ten human Gurus. Nevertheless, those who show an affinity to the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha are stringent *Khalsa* observers and attribute ‘appropriate’ status to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In this respect then, is it more fitting to talk of *sampradayas* rather than sects amongst Sikhs? Furthermore, in the case of the increasingly popular conversion to Sikhism by non-Punjabis, is ethnicity a relevant criterion by which to assess Sikh identity? It would seem that being Punjabi and *amritdharj* and stringently following the code of conduct in the Sikh *Rehat Maryada* (sanctioned by the SGPC) are what constitutes the *Tat Khalsa*'s ideology of a Sikh identity.

## Cross-References

- [Authority \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Guru Granth Sahib](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Takhar OK (2005) Sikh identity: an exploration of groups among Sikhs. Ashgate, Aldershot
2. McLeod WH (1989) Who is a Sikh? Clarendon, Oxford
3. Singh T (1922) The Gurdwara reform movement and the Sikh awakening. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar
4. McLeod WH (1973) The Kukas: a millenarian sect of the Punjab. In: Wood GA, O'Connor PS (eds) W. P. Morrell: a tribute. University of Otago Press, Dunedin
5. Ahluwalia MM (1965) Kukas: the freedom fighters of the Punjab. Allied Publishers, New Delhi
6. Macauliffe MA (1990 rp of 1909) The Sikh religion: vol 5. Low Price Publications, Delhi
7. Namdhari DS (1977) Gursikhi Vichardhara. Namdhari Vidhiak Jatha, Ludhiana
8. Singh N (1966) Enlighteners. Namdhari Sahit Prakashan, Sri Jiwan Nager
9. Singh N, Singh K (1989) Rebels against the British rule: guru Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi
10. Bali Y, Bali K (1995) Warriors in white. Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi
11. Bajwa FS (1965) Kuka movement. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
12. Singh J (1989 2nd edn, first published 1983) The religious philosophy of Guru Nanak. National Book Shop, Delhi
13. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries. Oxford University Press, Delhi
14. Lal K (1980) Religion, Gian and the mission. Sant Nirankari Mandal, Delhi
15. Dubin HE (2004) Living meditation. Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Amritsar
16. Khanna KL (1973 3rd edn of 1963) The Radha Soami spiritual science: a brief outline for sincere truth seekers. Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Amritsar
17. Singh C (1975) The Tenets of Sant Mat, produced by the Radha Soami Satsang Beas, UK
18. Puri, Lekh Raj (2007 7th edn of 1965) Radha Soami teachings. Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Beas
19. Takhar, Opinderjit Kaur (2011) Egalitarian hermeneutics from the *Bani* of Guru Nanak: his attitudes towards caste and females. Understanding Sikhism: The Research Journal 12(1&2)

20. Raidas Ji Ki Bani aur Jivan Charitra, no author cited (1908) Belvedere Steam Printing Works, Allahabad
21. Takhar OK (2011) The transmission of tradition and self representation amongst the Valmiki, Ravidasis and namdharis in Britain. In: Jacobsen K, Myrvold K (eds) *Sikhs in Europe: migration, identity and translocal practices*. Ashgate, Aldershot
22. Takhar OK (2011) We are not Sikhs or Hindus: issues of identity among the Valmiki and Ravidasis in Britain. In: Singh P (ed) *Sikhism in global context*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
23. Ashok SS (1980) *Mazhabi Sikhan da Itihas*. Jaspal Printing Press, Amritsar
24. McLeod WH (1976) *The evolution of the Sikh community*. Clarendon, Oxford
25. Leslie J (2003) Authority and meaning in Indian religions: Hinduism and the case of Valmiki. Ashgate, Aldershot
26. Atreya BL (1966) *The Yogavasishta and its philosophy*. Darshana Printers, Moradabad
27. Khalsa SK (1995) *The history of the Sikh dharma of the western hemisphere*. Sikh Dharma Publications, New Mexico
28. Dusenbery VA (1990) On the moral sensitivities of Sikhs in North America. In: Lynch OM (ed) *Divine passions: the social construction of emotion in India*. University of California Press, Berkeley
29. Khalsa SPK (1996) *Kundalini yoga: the flow of eternal power*. Time Capsule Books, Los Angeles
30. Dusenbery VA (1988) Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs: conflicting assertions of Sikh identity in North America. In: O'Connell JT et al (eds) *Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century*. Manohar, New Delhi
31. Kaur P (1973) Rejoinder. *Sikh Rev* 21:52–56

---

## Sense

### ► Logic (Sikhism)

---

## Sensory Experience

### ► Aesthetics (Sikhism)

---

## Seva

### ► Bhagti (Bhakti), Sikhism

---

## Seva (Service), Sikhism

Harjeet Singh Grewal

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

An injunction to serve humanity and creation as an integral aspect of worship, *Seva* is a component of *gurmata* or the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. For Sikhs, this means devoting oneself to a life in service to humanity through physical, intellectual, or material means.

### Seva

Broadly speaking, in South Asia, the word *seva* literally means to serve or to honor through worship. [3] In terms of society, this takes on the connotation of ritualized worship to the gods as the exclusive domain of the priestly class. [2, 3] It also comes to mean service to man, vis-à-vis the upper castes are served by members of the lower caste. However, the underlying exclusivity and prestige given to those in the upper echelons of society through both of the above connotations was seen by the Sikh Gurus as antithetical to the egalitarian and universalistic ethos inherent in the act of creation. Therefore, while using the commonly held association with *seva*, the Sikh Gurus developed an ethical and universal notion of *seva* that was linked to devotion through spending one's life in service to humanity and creation. [1]

*Seva* in the Sikh tradition is seen as a necessary component in the attempt to relinquish the dominance of ego consciousness upon one's self. [1, 3] Alongside the regular litany of prayers, *nitnem*, and the listening to hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, *kirtan*, *seva* is one of the essential aspects to Sikh devotion. As the Sikh tradition espouses a radical de-emphasis of mechanisms of differentiation that create antagonistic rifts between the illusory notion of distinctly absolute categories, *seva* is a means

to intentionally invert the limits of caste consciousness by subsuming service to the creator and service to man (by implication, creation) through the notion that unwilling or selfless action is at once service to both due to the Oneness of creation and creator. [1] This perspective focuses upon what is shared and singular in order to motivate action from disciples. From such a perspective the very notion of worship takes on an aspect of creative action and decries any attempt to place horizons or limits upon creative beings.

Derived from the assumption that there is a fundamental overlap or touching between creation and the creator, *seva* is an important practice on the way to becoming intimate with the one that you serve. It acts a way of attaining Oneness through ones human embodiment by total engagement in voluntary actions that are at their source not self-serving. There are three essential aspects to *seva*: (1) embodied physical acts (*tan*); (2) mental or intellectual striving (*man*); (3) acts that derive from selflessly giving of material wealth (*dhan*). *Seva* must incorporate these three components and be directed at those who are in need – it bears mentioning that this is not merely meant to indicate a material poverty, or being poor, but a state of neediness is one in which the human is wantonly fixated upon the desires of their ego. Thus, *seva* to those in need bears an aspect of working to dislodge the dominance of the ego for others through giving vis-à-vis *tan*, *man*, and *dhan*. [2, 3] While modern proponents of Sikhism tend to emphasize the value of embodied or physical acts in order to create an opposition to the system of exclusivity contained with the caste prescribed notions of service within Hinduism, such distinctions create a paradox in the universal assumptions from which Sikh *seva* arises but also risk the creation of an alternate parallel system of exclusivity based upon the penultimate nature of physical acts of *seva*. [1] Given the pluralistic nature of Sikh ethics and morality, it seems that these three aspects of *seva* were distinguished in order to connote that if *seva* begins with the eclipsing of an ego-centered worldview then the concomitant enacting of *tan*, *man*, and *dhan* can signal the efficaciousness of this programme to the disciple as well as their peers.

## Cross-References

- [Kirtan](#)
- [Nitnem](#)
- [Sanskara](#)

## References

1. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
2. Nabha KS (1999) *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh*. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
3. Singh H (1998) *Seva*. In: *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Shabad (Word), Sikhism

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Sabad](#); [Sabada](#); [Sabd](#); [Sabda](#); [Shabada](#); [Word](#)

## Definition

*Shabad* literally means the Word. It is also the doctrine of scripture or Word as Guru (*shabadguru*). In Sikh thought it is a vehicle which allows us to cross the ocean of existence, the ups and downs of this world that we inhabit, attain sovereign experience, and become sovereign beings.

## The Word of the Sikh Gurus

The term *shabad* is based on sound or tone that founds sacred words. [1–3] *Shabad* has been used in the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Nyaya and Vaisesika systems of thought, and lastly by grammarians such as Panini. In common parlance Sikhs use shabad to refer to the hymns or phrases

contained within the Guru Granth Sahib. *Shabad* is not to be misconstrued with everyday linguistic utterances. [5] The Guru Granth Sahib uses verb such as to speak (*bolna*) or to state (*akhana*) when referring to common speech. As used by the Sikh Gurus, *shabad* is a word or utterance that moves through an individual who is not ego centered. [2, 3] These utterances are integral to a form of poetic consciousness which the gurus enshrined within the Guru Granth Sahib. As such, *shabad* is the word that liberates and enables the shedding of an ego-centric mode of existence. Therefore, *shabad* is a form of knowledge that gives direct experience and knowledge of truth. [4] It is for these reasons that it is often paired with truth or teacher to make the composite terms *satguru* and *shabadguru* which are both of common occurrence in the Guru Granth Sahib. *Shabad* manifests only when the ego erases its own traces but this erasure occurs without annihilating itself. [4, 8, 9] This self-erasure is another name for the love between self and other that enables them to be One even in separation. Thus, the pure experience of Oneness entails a radical reorientation of consciousness which constitutes what is normally understood as liberation. [5] Thus the liberating reorientation of consciousness that the Sikh Gurus are looking for must happen primarily at the level of language or Word (*shabad*), such that one's ordinary relationship to language, which is based on self-naming where the "I" is attached to a primary identification to its own image and name, is transformed by its attunement to *shabad*. [4, 6]

Another variation on *shabad* is the term *anhadshabad* or *anhadnad* (lit. the "unspoken Word" or "unstruck Sound") inherited by the Sikh Gurus from the Siddhas and Naths, the expert practitioners of Hatha Yoga. According to Nath usage *anhadshabad* refers to the "Eternal Sound" that is heard at the climax of the Hatha Yoga process. In the context of the Sikh Gurus the term refers to words or a form of language that is not tainted by traces of ego. [6] When speech is common and overruled by the ego, communication between ego-centered individuals occurs through the usage of words meant to label things. [6] As *anhadshabad*, the Word itself speaks or

resounds without being spoken. This sounds like a tautology but actually indicates a mode of communication in which ego no longer controls neither the production of words, nor indeed the process of making words into things. [6] Removed from the grasp of ego, words arise from what is an otherwise internalized mode of speech that occurs between conscious (ego) and unconscious (nonego) mind. As such, the *anhadshabad* is neither ego nor is it nonego and therefore it avoids the dualistic separation of mind into active and nonactive principles. The unspoken Word arises when the mind speaks with itself. [4] This is the basis for a departure from the standards of everyday social reality where speech is communicative in that it makes sense to everybody. Devoid of dualistic ideas of mind, the Word acts as spontaneous expressions of wonder (*vismad*); just as creation simply happens without asking why, so the unspoken Word arises without connection to intention, desire, or will. [5, 7, 8]

## References

1. Cole OW (1990) A popular dictionary of Sikhism. Curzon, London
2. Kohli SS (1992) A conceptual encyclopedia of Guru Granth Sahib. Manohar, Delhi
3. Kohli SS (1996) Dictionary of Guru Granth Sahib. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
4. Mandair A (2005) Teachings of the Gurus: Selections from Sikh Scripture. London, Routledge
5. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
6. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed. London, Bloomsbury
7. Nabha KS (1999) Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
8. Singh J (1983) The religious philosophy of Guru Nanak. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
9. Singh H (1998) "Shabad" in encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Shabad Kirtan

► [Music \(Sikh Popular and Religious\)](#)

---

## Shabada

- ▶ [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Shahadat

- ▶ [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Shaheed

- ▶ [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Shahidi

- ▶ [Martyrdom \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)

- ▶ [Gurdwara Reform Movement](#)

---

## Shodasha Samskara

- ▶ [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Shortcoming

- ▶ [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Sikh

- ▶ [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

---

## Sikh Homeland

- ▶ [Khalistan](#)

---

## Sikh Musicology

- ▶ [Kirtan \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Sikh Nationalism

- ▶ [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)
- ▶ [Khalistan](#)

---

## Sikh Sovereignty

- ▶ [Sikhs and Empire](#)

---

## Sikh Studies

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

---

## Definition

A scholarly field of study and growing body of knowledge with a central focus upon the Sikh community, its history, and religious culture, Sikhism.

---

## Sikh Studies: (Post)Coloniality and Nationalism in an Emergent Field

The roots of this field of scholarly enquiry, or study, whose primary focus is the relationship between Sikh people and their religion begins in the middle of the twentieth century with the partition of the



South Asian subcontinent into Pakistan and India. While a body of literature concerning the Sikh people and their religion had been developing in European languages such as English, French, and German, since the eighteenth century the institutional apparatus for studying Sikhs was not available at this early stage. It is just shortly after 1947 that a substantial interest in the Sikh people emerges as a peculiarly global phenomenon due to the alignment of a constellation of issues around ethnonationalism and institution building, communal and state violence, changes in global immigration policies, and anxieties associated with displacement or dispersion. Not only to works continue to be published in the European languages but a plethora of studies emerge regarding Guru Nanak and the Sikhs in Hindi, Urdu, and especially Punjabi. While the field has been traditionally dominated by historical and philological textual study, there were early and initial forays into philosophy and ethics as well. However, the larger motives of these early scholarly works functioned largely to assert the uniqueness of Sikhs as a separate world religion. [3] More contemporary scholarship certainly continues to explore these vital avenues of research, but the field has expanded to incorporate the disciplinary perspectives of anthropology, sociology, and political sciences. In many ways, Sikh Studies carries on the work of attempting to map or categorize the Sikhs of Punjab upon the cultural tapestry of diversity which arises from the subcontinent, and yet, as many western scholars will admit, it persists in being a group which confounds categorical schema at every turn. An emerging turn in Sikh Studies scholarship is the incorporation of critical modes of thinking, theory, philosophy, and antiphilosophy which uses central Sikh texts, culture, and history to engage and actualize Sikh thinking to force an encounter with its hegemonic other. [1, 4] This entry describes the almost concomitant development of the field in the Indian province of Punjab and western universities in order to maintain that the very idea of Sikh Studies is haunted by the premise of negotiation and dialogue between (post)colonial geopolitics. As such it is heavily involved in practices of regulating people through biopower – or the application of political power on aspects of human life while

always already incorporating scholarship which responds and resists such pressures. The section will end by discussing recent developments mentioned above that attempt to articulate strategies of avoiding the polemics which arise from the project of religion-making through Sikh Studies.

Tony Ballantyne's work, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (2006), recognizes the productive "crossroads" where diaspora and colonialism met in a productive, destabilizing, and dangerous cross-cultural engagement. [1] The movement of people was integral to the colonial system and enabled Sikhs to emerge as a mobile and upwardly affluent population. Furthermore, these two phenomena were integral to the emergence of modern notions of Sikh identity in a process of challenge and engagement that often led to unintended consequences. In a different but related manner Harjot Oberoi's study, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994), examines the pivotal role that an emergent nationalism played in the rearticulation of boundaries in altering notions of community, self, and knowledge during colonialism. [5] One of the often unrecognized consequences of these trends was the development of a body of knowledge on Sikhs as a unique nation and religion. The furtherance of this burgeoning knowledge found a home in Sikh attempts to find new institutions for knowledge production in the aftermath of partition. Up until this point in time, Sikhs centers of knowledge had developed alongside *dharamsalas* and *gurdwaras* or as independent orders of learning, *taksals*, *maths*, and *deras* and as mobile itinerant groups of Khalsa Sikhs, *jathas*, that roamed the countryside. However, partition had necessitated that the Punjab University, Lahore (established in 1882), also be divided; the Indian portion would find a home in the new provincial capital of Chandigarh where construction of the campus began in 1956.

The reestablishment of the 1882 Punjab University at Chandigarh complimented the already extant Khalsa College, Amritsar, which had been established in 1892 through the support of members of the Singh Sabha movement and in

conjunction with the colonial government. As Khalsa College was created largely through the donation of wealthy Sikh families its principal mandate was to provide a modern higher education to Sikhs in Punjab. After the communal tensions which precipitated the violent partition of Punjab, it appears that this mandate would be furthered not only through the establishment of Punjab University, Chandigarh, but shortly thereafter with the creation of Punjabi University, Patiala (1962), and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (1969). These universities produced seminal Sikh scholars such as Fauja Singh, Ganda Singh, Kirpal Singh, Piar Singh, Gurbachan Singh Talib, Tara Singh, Jodh Singh, J.S. Grewal, and Rattan Singh Jaggi. There is a spate of scholarly output surrounding the pcentenary celebrations of Guru Nanak's birth, and a substantial body of work has been produced since that time. The summa of this body of scholarly literature continues to assert the uniqueness of the Sikh religion in the colonial pattern of historiography while simultaneously breaking with the colonial pattern by necessarily having to draw upon developing ideas of Indian philosophy, ethics, politics, and culture when engaging a broader national audience.

### **Sikh Studies in the West: Migration and Violence**

While the establishment of Sikh Studies in Punjab was quite rapid and strongly associated with investment in a developing national system of higher education modeled upon the Western university, the journey toward attaining international recognition for academic Sikh Studies has not been easy and is continuing to unfold. As Sikhs migrated and settled in different parts of the world, their traditions and way of life attracted the interest of scholars, journalists, and other educators from the host countries. Based on early settlement patterns, these host countries were mainly Britain, Canada, and the United States. Initially very little information was available to the general public in the host countries. However, as a result of cultural pressures including concerns

for maintaining the continuity of their tradition, engaging and interacting with the majoritarian public sphere, and fiduciary challenges to the assimilative drives of their respective multicultural societies, there is a respectable body of knowledge about Sikhs in many world religion textbooks and religious studies programs today. Not only is this the case, but there is a distinct and flourishing scholarly field of Sikh Studies within the university sector, a growing number of scholars who wish to study Sikhs and Sikhism, and an increasing number of university chairs devoted to Sikh Studies. Many of these changes can be ascribed to Sikh interests in establishing themselves in a diasporic context working alongside a group of motivated and interested members of the majoritarian sphere.

The establishment of an international body of scholarship was punctuated by moments of violence including Sikh altercation with the Indian state in the 1980s and 1990s, the Air India bombing, the attacks on Sikhs after 9/11, and the recent Oak Creek shooting at the Sikh temple of Wisconsin. Events such as these define the terms of the dialogue occurring in academia, but also in the popular media. The emergence of Sikh studies within the humanities and social sciences can be usefully seen through several phases of development. The first phase can be traced to the confluence of two disciplines: area studies and religious studies. Both these disciplines coincide with Western interests in the Cold War era and became central to organizing the study of non-Western cultures in the university system. The first generation of scholars were attracted to the study of Sikhs and the Punjab region for various reasons. They included W. H. McLeod, N. G. Barrier, Mark Jurgensmeyer, and Christopher Shackle, all of whom can be regarded as pioneers of modern Western Sikh studies, and most of these scholars had individuals had sustained engagement with their counterparts at recently established universities in Punjab. An important early event was the 1976 international conference on Sikhism organized by Jurgensmeyer at the University of California, Berkeley, which laid the basis for future university–community collaborations. [2] W.H. McLeod suggested the establishment of

Sikh Chairs at universities in North America during a talk given during the 1979 inaugural celebrations for the Guru Nanak Center on Baisakhi day. [6] Thus, just over a decade after Sikh Studies established itself in the university system of Indian Punjab, calls were being made internationally for similar advances. It bears mentioning that a less studied aspect of this burgeoning interest was occurring through groups of scholars in places such as Aligarh Muslim University who began translating major works of Guru Nanak into Urdu. Such calls can be understood to be associated with the changes in immigration policies which occurred in all three host countries throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Both Sikh communities and their hosts were beginning to understand the realities of migrating to new geographies, and individuals with a keen sense of foresight decided that one avenue worthy of pursuit was to establish a presence in the North American university system. Not only was this an important way to help the majoritarian community engage with Sikhs, it was also a way for Sikhs to be active in the negotiation of their continually increasing presence in new locales. Concerns about integration, assimilation, accommodation, as well as preservation, reformation, and revitalization led to the second major phase of Sikh studies in which the intellectual growth of the field was matched by an impressive expansion of funding resources from the community. The Sikh community in Canada was quick to mobilize around the suggestion of creating a university chair in Sikh Studies. Pashaura Singh describes how work began enthusiastically in 1980 by the Sikh Society of Calgary and was transferred to the Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada at the All Canada Sikh Convention at Calgary in 1981. Shortly thereafter, negotiations were started with the University of British Columbia to house the chair, and by 1985 the formal agreement was signed creating the "Program of Punjabi and Sikh Studies". [6] However, this fortuitous achievement was marred by the events surrounding the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army, the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her

Sikh bodyguards, and mass pogroms that claimed numerous Sikh lives in Delhi during 1984. Incidentally, the same event promulgated the creation of the second chair in Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This incident, much like 9/11 and Oak Creek more recently, served to highlight the dearth of knowledge about the Sikh community. The University of Michigan was amongst pioneering institutions that developed a curriculum about Sikhs. An endowment fund was established by the University of Michigan in conjunction with the Sikh Studies Association of Michigan on 23 July 1986. [6]

This fortuitous combination of funding and new scholarship was not only colored by the political crisis in Punjab during the 1980s, rather it quickly became overshadowed by the crisis. Emotions were heightened in areas of Sikh concentration such as Vancouver, South Hall, Coventry, and the Bay Area in California which led to mass protests against the Indian government and the country's Hindu majority. As communal tensions were heightened during this period Western governments became concerned with Sikhs from a security standpoint. The amicable scholarly process of engaging in questions concerning the culture of the Sikh tradition was overrun by circumspection regarding Sikh diasporas as young Sikh men, many born and raised outside of Punjab, were returning to defend their people and tradition from a perceived threat. Thus, during this period heightened awareness of the tradition of Sikh martyrdom came to the forefront as Sikhs deployed this heritage for political affectation and scholars quickly turned to consider questions about militancy, fundamentalism, and violence as inimical to the acculturation of Sikhs in secular multicultural societies. Some Sikh community leaders and intellectuals responded to this crisis by turning toward the university as a analytical institution that could assist in balancing the negative media imagery about Sikhs at the time. Collectively there was a flurry of conferences throughout North America which ultimately led to the creation of the further chairs and programs in Sikh studies due to concerns like those

expressed at the University of Michigan. Programs were initiated at prestigious centers such as the University of Toronto and Columbia University while University of California, Santa Barbara, also established its own chair. The results of these attempts were mixed, but with the increased emotional fervor and perception of threat to their existence some within diasporic Sikh communities would soon reexamine the plausibility of all of these programs under intense scrutiny. There also arose a strategy of sustained attack from sectors of the Sikh community through local community newspapers and the Punjab media [4, 6] – at times it was the very people who had proactively sought to establish the research chairs in the first place, but this scrutiny was also applied by people in the community who became politicized due to events in Punjab. The Columbia and Toronto programs were closed, but the ones at Michigan and UBC survived.

### Old Paths and New Trajectories

The decade spanning the late 1980s to the late 1990s was a bewildering one for scholars in Sikh Studies. Despite the fact that many of them were breaking new ground by questioning received canons of scripture and history, or opening up Sikh Studies to new avenues of inquiry such as feminism, political ethnography, etc., they found themselves trapped within the competing rhetoric of Sikh ethnonationalism and anti-Sikh sentiment generated by the Indian and secular Western media. [4, 6] By the year 2000, as the political landscape of Punjab and the Sikh diaspora calmed down, there was a renewed optimism about the future of Sikh studies, and major American universities once again began attracting funds from Sikh donors. As the situation stands, in 2013 there are now nine functional chairs of Sikh studies in North America with the possibility of two more in the near future. Moreover there is a large and growing network of Sikh studies scholars and an academic journal devoted solely to Sikh studies, *Sikh Formations*. Thus, while it may have

appeared to some that Sikh Studies as a field was threatened by extinction due to the Punjab crisis the scholars persevered in academic interests and grew the programs by taking on graduate students. This has helped facilitate an ever-increasing body of scholarly literature on the Sikhs. The students of universities such as University of British Columbia, University of Michigan, UC Santa Barbara, UC Riverside, and Hofstra University benefit from learning about an important global culture and tradition whose members they are likely to encounter but also learn about the vectors of learning and conceptualization the Sikh tradition has employed through its short history to instill a strong ethical attitude against injustice but toward hospitable plurality, egalitarianism, and societal upliftment. The Sikh Chairs engage with the local communities and often assist in instilling a critical balanced continuation of Sikh heritage for those who are born in the tradition. Many times, their classrooms function as neutral spaces to ask questions which would not be possible in other settings such as the home or Gurdwara such as textual meaning, religious practice, identity, aspects of the culture, etc. – for nonheritage students a similar neutrality is created to posit questions that may be inappropriate in more casual everyday interactions with Sikhs. Thus, they are acting as vital avenues for exchange and engagement which assists in addressing some of the concerns they were initially established to approach. The Sikh Chairs are enabled to focus their research agendas upon issues relating to Sikhs as a global community. They have continued to address important historical questions relating to Punjab and the subcontinent in relation to Sikhs, but in conjunction with other scholars with an interest in the Sikh community many have engaged in pioneering work studying the cultural history and sociological issues unique to Sikh diaspora. They have also conducted anthropological studies and explored literary analysis in order to broaden the scope of the literature on the Sikh people. A recent and developing interest is media and music which promises to produce more important work.

While a number of seminal studies have been produced in this manner, much of this scholarship tends to employ Western anthropocentric models of scholarship which tend to objectify Sikhs as mere datum in epistemological analyses – this has been the cause of tension toward such scholars from both Sikhs in the diaspora as well as by scholars in Punjab. This has led to the emergence of an apologetic which seeks to create two parallel streams of scholarship – a “critical” body of scholarship located outside Punjab and a “traditional” body of scholarship which emerges from within the region. However, it is significant to note that since 2000 there has been a tangible shift in the nature of Sikh studies discourse. The shift came when a new generation of scholars began to expose the deeply problematic nature of the opposition between University and Community, or critical and traditional, in order to show that the conventional dominant methodologies used by the generation of scholars groomed by W. H. McLeod were simply reflections of the secular ideology of public versus private spheres, politics versus religion, critical versus devotional scholarship, etc., that demanded the privatization of the Sikh subjective position or lived-experience, on the grounds that it was “religious” and therefore inherently sectarian. [4] Although it has its roots in the same intense scrutiny visited upon Sikh Chairs in the critical decade between the 1980s and 1990s, scholars of the so-called McLeod group banded together in defence of academic freedom, objectivity, and the centrality of secular critical methodologies to Sikh studies, which they believed was under threat from what they perceived as “fundamentalist elements” of the Sikh community who did not understand the rules of the public sphere. This division is problematic and unproductive for several reasons.

Needless to say, this apologetic reappropriates colonial divisions of labor where natives catalogued data making it available and pliable for colonial administrators who could then organize, interpret, and theorize based upon what was accumulated. It circumscribes and insulates Sikh traditions of knowledge production with the effect

of constraining their sphere of applicability. The apologetic also minimizes the role of professional Sikh scholars working outside of Punjab by forcing the impossible choice of upholding a perspective amenable to the “critical” camp – this choice is forced because of the necessity to defend the very idea of academic freedom, and in this way it mirrors pressures put on minorities to more broadly defend societal rights and liberties in the face of religious fundamentalism. Lastly, this binary is a categorical mistake predicated upon reducing the necessity to engage with questions raised by scholars in Punjab about scholarship produced outside the region. As such, this false division attempts to separate scholars by a methodological difference relating to approach and rigor, but any serious reading of the studies by scholars from Punjab reveals no great dissimilarity in either approach or rigor. It affects a refusal to dialogue, a refusal of dialogue and thereby diminishes the ability to produce rigorous studies by stifling criticality, scrutiny, and analytical judiciousness as well as preventing productive debate among varying perspectives to the effect of minimizing the ability to impact larger fields of study. Thus the shift in Sikh studies is centered upon the adoption of a paradoxical standpoint that is able, on the one hand, to harness the potential of postsecular critical theory to articulate a subjective Sikh position and Sikh modes of reasoning, while on the other hand it contests the cultural bias inherent within Western theory. [3]

Important development continues in areas such as pedagogy, language training, manuscript location and preservation, as well as translation of important Sikh texts and creation of reference materials. [6] Recent scholarship has adopted a doubly critical toward both religious and secular perspectives in order to attempt to break with early paradigms which treat Sikh Studies as a locus for unidirectional dialogue and discourses of biopower. Through this perspective, Sikhs have the potential to become significant and active agents in knowledge production as opposed to being mere objects of knowledge. This is an



important breakthrough as it gives Sikhs the ability to align with similarly interested contingents who are actively contesting the intellectual framework of the public sphere and therefore the political systems of their host country for the positive end of pursuing an amenable multicultural plurality. It does so by enabling these groups to claim the public sphere as their own rather than being in a position of alienation or estrangement by the appearance of foreignness. This perspective attempts to deal with the lived experience of the Sikhs as an interconnected and integrated community deeply impacted by the trend of globalization.

## Cross-References

- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)
- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Migration, Sikh](#)
- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Sikhi](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Ballantyne T (2006) *Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world*. Duke University Press, Durham
2. Juergensmeyer M (1979) The forgotten tradition: Sikhism in the study of world religions. In: Juergensmeyer M, Gerald Barrier N (eds) *Sikh studies comparative perspectives on a changing tradition*. Berkeley Religious Studies Series & Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, pp 13–23
3. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation*. Columbia University Press, New York
4. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
5. Oberoi H (1994) *The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Chicago University Press, Chicago
6. Singh P (2014) New directions in Sikh studies. In: Singh P, Fenech LE (eds) *The Oxford handbook of Sikh studies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 625–643

## Sikh Theology

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Sikhi

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Definition

A term used by Sikhs to describe their path of learning as a lived experience.

## Sikhi: The Path Toward Learning

Sikhs at the most general level are disciples of a line of ten embodied Gurus and a community who currently vest all worldly and spiritual authority in their scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. While much of the formative moments in the development of Sikh thought can be traced to the Punjab region of North India (lit. land of the five rivers), today Sikhs live in almost every corner of the world and are active members of the societies which they call home. The term Sikhism is a Western word coined not by Sikhs but by the British in the nineteenth century at the height of colonialism. [3] In this sense it is like the words Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism which also are not indigenous to the Indian lexicon. However, it has been important in the history of Western engagement with Sikhs for two main reasons: (1) through the discourse on the History of Religions, it provided a framework wherein to codify and delimit Sikhs thereby assisting in creating a body of knowledge through which colonialism could forcibly rule Sikhs and (2) it provided the grounds upon which Sikhs engage in a dialogue with colonial administrators and later with fellow citizens

in liberal democracies in order to gain for themselves rights and freedoms associated with the practice of religion. [3] Despite this continued use of such strategies, Sikhs have concomitantly developed a parallel notion of themselves by using the term Sikhi which, like the word Sikh, is derived from the Punjabi verb *sikhna*, to learn, and also has roots in the tradition through composite terms like *gursikhi* used by Sikh hermeneutes. [1, 2] Unlike Sikhism, the word Sikhi does not denote an object or thing. Rather it has a temporal connotation and refers to a path of learning as a lived experience. It does not function in contradistinction or opposition to the term Sikhism, but more importantly Sikhi offers another point of reference, or mode of engagement, which is to some degree aloof to the rational delimitations of the History of Religions discourse. This alternative provides vantage for engaging with some of the core principles taught by the Sikh Gurus precisely because it unsettles the objectification which arises through the term Sikhism while simultaneously unsettling the stable notion of a Sikh subject as the bulwark for the emplotment of Sikhs within the History of Religions discourse. [3]

Sikhs undertake a path of self-perfection under the guidance of a spiritual master called Guru (to be distinguished from the lower case “guru” which is traditionally used in India to refer to any respected teacher). For Sikhs, the ten spiritual masters each played a role in articulating Sikhi as a path through their teachings. These teachings are in the form of poetic compositions embodied in the Sikh scripture known as the Guru Granth Sahib. The Guru Granth Sahib is today considered the sole Guru of Sikhs as it contains verses which demarcate the path of Sikhi for those who meditate upon its contents and engage in active means of learning at Sikh centers. The community as a whole is known as the Panth, which is derived from the Sanskrit *path* meaning path. However, the word Panth slowly evolved to refer to the community of Sikhs as a political body as opposed to the devotional or religious path articulated in the Guru Granth Sahib. However, the entirety of the Sikh project is beyond such binary oppositions

and can be more at home in the notion of Sikhi. [3–5]

The importance of the term Sikhi is that, when used to develop a posttheistic understanding of Sikh experience it enables one to avoid the dualities such as secularism and religion. It also decenters the Western fetishizing of Sikhs and an anthropocentric category beholden to a cultural/religious epistemology objectified as Sikhism using the category of World Religion. Such constructions effectively evade crucial aspects of the Sikh tradition, such as its complete involvement in the material world and its politics, as well as the close connection between its devotional mysticism and the question of violence in order to put forth constructions which exist within the discourse a priori of the inclusion of Sikhism in the body of World Religions. This set of pre-existing questions arise from an intellectual crisis occurring in the Christian tradition which relate to notions of authority, institutional formations. Therefore, Sikhi is a term used to demarcate a separate and developing field of critical thought which cannot be completely circumscribed by the discourse of World Religions for Sikhism and is, in many ways, resistant to that category. [3–5]

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Akali Dal](#)
- ▶ [Sikh Studies](#)
- ▶ [Sikhism](#)
- ▶ [Singh Sabha/Reform Movements](#)

## References

1. Fenech L (2013) *The Sikh Zafarnamah of Guru Gobind Singh: a discursive blade in the heart of the Mughal empire*. Oxford University Press, New York
2. Juergensmeyer M (2014) Global Sikhism. In: *The Oxford handbook of Sikh studies*. Oxford University Press, New York
3. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
4. Padam PS (1997) *Guru Ghar: Sikhi siddhanta bare wicara caraca*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
5. Singh K (1932) *Amar Khalsa Athwa Sikhi sidak de camatkara*. Phulwari Pustak, Bhandara

## Sikhism

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

Representation of the Sikh tradition as a “world religion” and as a nation. Sikhism includes constructing a set of religious tenets or laws and positing it as a form of South Asian or Indian monotheism. This representation is centered upon an objectal understanding of a Sikh subject which was produced alongside the notion of the Sikh tradition as a “world religion” and as a nation. The amalgam of this pivotal transformative modern process is reflected in the term Sikhism.

### Sikhism: The Religion of the Sikhs

During the early twentieth century leading Sikh scholars helped to construct a modern self-representation of the Sikh tradition as a “world-religion” and as a nation (*qaum*). This was done by facilitating the translation of indigenous terms such as *Sikhi*, Sikh *dharam*, *gurmata*, and *Panth* as Sikhism. It is this peculiarly modern self-representation that tends to be reproduced in most contemporary accounts as Sikhism. In doing so, the Sikh tradition appears to be a neat package that includes all the prerequisites of a world religion, a distinct ethnic group, and nation. These include the following: (i) a distinct theology or doctrine whose core is ethical monotheism; (ii) a distinct set of beliefs and practices; (iii) a historical founder (Nanak); (iv) historical places of worship and pilgrimage (*gurdwaras*); (v) a community with well-defined boundaries (the Khalsa); (vi) a distinctly Sikh worldview. [3, 4, 10, 11] As indicated above, this neat repackaging of an internally fluid path (*Sikhi*) into a seemingly fixed and immutable entity (Sikhism as a “religion” among the other religions of the

world) which can be reproduced seamlessly through a number of different media. This enables Sikhs and Sikhism to be easily identifiable, although the mechanism of this identification depends on the creation of a superficial relation to Christianity which provides the essential type for “religion” in general, and for other “religions” of the world. [4, 6]

Once packaged as a “religion” or an essentially “religious” community, Sikhs and Sikhism are made familiar to our modern sensibilities. They no longer appear to be perplexing particularly to outsiders, for the simple reason that everyone is familiar with what religion is. Moreover, this seemingly benign moniker for the Sikh tradition can circulate broadly both within the Sikh community and throughout other groups of societies with which Sikhs interact as a natural unproblematic representation of Sikhs. This is because Sikhs become reducible to a religious type (monotheism), an ethnic type (Indian), a geographical location (India) and a historical period (fifteenth century) through the category of Sikhism. [3, 4, 7–10] The unproblematic circulation and political deployment of Sikhism to vouchsafe rights and privileges of citizenship is a clear indication that Sikhs and Sikhism have settled into a comfortable position within the Anglophone consciousness but have also co-opted this very same consciousness as a mode of representation and thought. [1, 2, 5] At a certain level this kind of representation is by no means unhelpful, especially as it provides quick and uncomplicated answers to basic questions like “What is Sikhism?” or “Who is a Sikh?” However, if one seeks to inquire beyond such question or even more deeply into these very questions one immediately faces the fragility of such basic answers. This can become an issue in matters of the public sphere or the judiciary in democratic nation and unintentionally lead to hindrance or confusion for several reasons. First, it characterizes Sikhs and Sikhism as defined objects with a truth value that corresponds unproblematically to the lived experience of Sikhs. The apparent truth value of such definitions renders them difficult to contest and be redefined within the Sikh

community, partly because Sikhs themselves have internalized them as truth statements that appear to correspond to the way they live. As seeming truth statements they elide the fact that “Sikhism” is not an indigenous term but a colonial construct. [4] While indigenous terms *sikhi*, *gursikhi*, *gurmata*, or *dharam* are extensively used by Sikhs who speak Punjabi, bilingual Sikhs, and monolingual English speaker as an internal way of self-reference, it is when Sikhs engage in the public sphere that the dominance of Sikhism is revealed. When engaging in the public sphere it is Sikhism that takes precedence thereby forcing the identification with the category “religion”. [3, 4, 11] There is now overwhelming evidence to show that this process of “religion-making” that is the transformation of an action-oriented Sikhi into a rigid object Sikhism, occurred during the colonial period through a process of intercultural mimesis between Sikh and European scholars disguised as natural translation. Through the term Sikhism, Sikhs are presented as an essentially religious type whose lived experience is essentially a private individual form of devotional practice. In doing so, they are distanced from the exercise of public power which belongs to the “political” types (emperors, administrators, politicians, colonial rulers, etc.) and can only enter the public sphere through a dominant process of translation which has always already taken place. [3, 4]\*

## Cross-References

- [Arjan \(Guru\)](#)
- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Relics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Sikh Studies](#)
- [Sikhi](#)
- [Symbols \(Sikhism\)](#)

\*A earlier version of this entry had appeared in Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (2013), *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London, Bloomsbury.

## References

1. Cole O (2004) *Understanding Sikhism*. Dunedin Academic, Edinburgh
2. Jakobsh D (2012) *Sikhism*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu
3. Mandair A (2009) *Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation*. Columbia University, New York
4. Mandair A (2013) *Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury, London
5. McLeod WH (1997) *Sikhism*. Penguin Books, London
6. Oberoi H (1994) *The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Chicago University Press, Chicago
7. Shan HS (1974) *Scholarly study of Sikhism*. Punjab University, Chandigarh
8. Singh F (1969) *Sikhism*. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (1996) *Current thoughts on Sikhism*. Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh
10. Singh K, Singh D (1997) *Sikhism, its philosophy and history*. Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh
11. van der Linden B (2008) *Moral languages of Punjab: the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, and Ahmadiyahs*. Manohar Publishers, New Delhi

## Sikhs Abroad

- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)

## Sikhs and Empire

Anne Murphy

Department of Asian Studies, UBC Asian Centre,  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC,  
Canada

## Synonyms

[Imperial power and Sikh tradition](#); [Mughal/Sikh relations](#); [Sikh sovereignty](#); [Sikhs in the British Empire](#)

## Definition

Overview of the imperial contexts of Sikh tradition.

## The Historical Development of Sikhism in Imperial Contexts

The Sikh tradition has taken shape within several major imperial formations. These imperial contexts do not only provide the broad historical background for the development of the tradition; they have directly shaped in significant ways its historical development. They also provide important conceptual and ideological underpinnings for the imagination of the community in relation to the state, and in relation to the realms of the political and the religious, organizational categories of the social world that developed in dynamic ways with reference to imperial state formation.

The historical influences of empire are multi-fold. Imperial forces impinge overtly, for example, on the development of the tradition with the killing of the fifth and ninth Gurus at Mughal hands, the role of Mughal as well as sub-imperial, local polities in the demise of the tenth Guru's center at Anandpur, and the subsequent political chaos in Punjab in the eighteenth century as Mughal power disintegrated and power coalesced in the hands of Sikh and other forces. The Sikh engagement with empire took a new course with the establishment of an independent imperial formation under a Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, at Lahore in 1799, and with the complex interaction of the Sikhs with the British Raj. Such imperial contexts shaped the Sikh community also in more subtle ways, such as in the ways in which sovereignty and property were conceived in the Mughal and immediate post-Mughal period, and how such conceptions were transformed – and, with them, Sikh understandings of the same – under British rule. An account of Sikhs and empire must account for these more subtle forms of influence alongside more direct forms.

## The Mughal State and the Development of Sikh Tradition

Guru Nanak commented directly on the early formation of the Mughal Empire – which provided the context for the shaping of the Sikh tradition under

the Gurus – with his dismay at the violence associated with the conquest of North India by Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire:

*Khurāsān khasmānā kī ā hindustān ḍarāiā*

Babur has conquered Khurasan, and has now terrified Hindustan . . .

*ratan vigāri vigoe kuttī n muiā sār na kāi*

The dogs have spoiled and laid waste to the jewel [of the land] and no one has word of the dead. (Adi Granth, p. 360)

Of course, the Mughals were preceded by other imperial state formations, the Delhi-based Sultanates, which also shaped Guru Nanak's life; he worked in the *modhīkhānā* or storehouse of Daulat Khan Lodhi, an administrator for the state during the period of the Lodhi sultanate. Many literate Punjabis, particularly of the Khatri caste (as Nanak was), found employment with the imperial administration in Punjab under the Lodhis as well as under the Mughals. Persian in particular was an important asset in the period for those seeking employment, as Persian had been an important language of state in the region for centuries. Muzaffar Alam has indeed shown that Persian traditions were well established in literary and administrative terms in the region by the eleventh century, when Lahore was known as “Little Ghazna,” a reference to the Punjab's connection to political centers to the west. ([2], p. 133) After Babur conquered parts of North and Northeastern India, he died in 1530. His son Nasiruddin Humayun added further territory to his father's dominion before being ousted by Sher Shah Suri in 1540. Humayun took refuge in the Persian Safavid court before returning to North India to reassert control over what he and his father had conquered, in 1555. After his death a year later, Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, his son, succeeded him, to rule until 1605.

The period of the first five Gurus was profoundly shaped by the ways the Mughal Empire developed under the guiding hand of Emperor Akbar. As is well known, Akbar was eclectic in his cultural and religious interests, and actively engaged in dialogue with a range of thinkers and practitioners in his formulation of his own religious vision, *dīn-i-illāhi*. The Akbar period provided a relatively safe and stable period of growth



for the Sikh community, through the Guruships of the third, fourth, and fifth Gurus. The dynamic religious environment of Punjab with its multiple communities in dialogue and contact deeply influenced the emerging Sikh tradition, and the pursuit of a generally tolerant and open approach to multiple religious communities and ideologies by the state encouraged an environment of collaboration, dialogue, and adaptation.

The imperial state impinged more directly on the historical development of the Sikh tradition in the post-Akbar period, with tragic results. Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur's deaths at the hands of imperial forces – Guru Arjan's at the beginning of the reign of the emperor Jahangir, who succeeded Akbar, and Guru Tegh Bahadur's in the time of Aurangzeb, the grandson of Jahangir – demonstrate the dramatic ways that the state attempted to control and curtail the growing community. Both examples demonstrate also the prominence of the Sikh community in the period and the possible challenge to the state or sovereign authority that the Guru's influence could constitute. Control over the Sikh community thus came to be perceived as a political necessity for imperial forces as the stature of the community grew. This adversarial relationship with Mughal imperial forces is indeed the main contributing force toward the development of the ideology of *mīrī-pīrī*, or the pairing of temporal and religious power in the person and leadership of the Guru, a formulation of authority generally attributed to the sixth Guru, Hargobind.

### Power and Sovereignty in the Mughal Context

The concepts of *mīrī* and *pīrī* and allied ideas and practices reflect the complexity of political and religious articulations in this period. Lou Fenech has brilliantly shown the diverse ways in which the Mughal imperial courtly idiom was mobilized in Sikh contexts to articulate power and authority. [6] This was in keeping with other Mughal period cultural practices, which articulated religious and social power in diverse environments through the imperial idiom of the *darbār* or court and the

material practices associated with it, such as *khil'at*, the ritualized gift exchange between superior and inferior, suzerain and vassal, and teacher and student. [10] The mobilization of imperial pageantry and cultural forms was an important part of Sikh self-imagination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; as Robin Reinhart has argued, it fundamentally informed the formation of the Dasam Granth, the text most centrally associated with the tenth Guru's *darbār*. [21] It was not exclusive to the Sikh tradition, however, nor to the articulation of sovereignty; social and religious elites of the period, in general terms, iterated position, authority, and power through the imperial idiom. *Khil'at*, for example, was an important social practice associated with rank and loyalty within Sufi or Islamic mystical circles. The imperial metaphor, therefore, expressed a diverse range of not always political forms of power. Conversely, exchanges in the state setting are impossible to designate as simply “non-religious,” as revealed by Sudipta Sen's work on the construction of history in Indo-Persianate contexts in North India. Interaction with the emperor was engaged in religious modes, particularly but not exclusively in relation to the emperor Akbar, adding a particular importance to the remembering of interactions with the emperor within historical accounts, such that “the memory of imperial association added transcendental significance to the past, particularly among a heterogeneous nobility which was not necessarily bound by the same religious sensibility”. ([23], p. 250) The court could mirror the world of the religious, as argued by Nicholas Dirks, who found *pūjā* or worship to act as the “the root political metaphor” in South Indian state formation: “On the one hand, ritual was a pervasive political fact; on the other, politics was permeated by ritual forms”. ([6], p. 47 first quote, 129s) This does not mean that all politics were religious: “the deity was not so much the paradigmatic sovereign as worship was the paradigmatic exchange”. ([6], p. 289) Similarly, in the Sufi context, Nile Green has shown the deeply entwined nature of the idioms of the political court and religious court in the Deccan. Thus, “sufi and political texts did not so much borrow from one another's distinct spheres, but were rather

both part of a wider literary and cultural ecumene in which kings and saints shared centre-stage together”. ([11], p. 28) Such a use of the language and symbolism of kingship did not mean Sufi texts did not critique secular power, but that they “often shared the symbolic and linguistic vocabularies through which their power was expressed”. ([11], p. 38)

The imperial imaginary thus was manifest in diverse cultural and religious settings in the Mughal period, and drew deeply upon and was deeply entwined in religious idioms. Such mobilizations of imperial representations of authority invite consideration of their political status: were those who mobilized such representations contenders for political authority on par with the imperial *darbār* or court, or was the use of this broad vocabulary of authority peripherally or only partially politically marked? More specifically, for our purposes, and simply put: does the central place of the idiom of the court in the ideas and practices of the Sikh Gurus reveal a pre-colonial prehistory of a later idea of Sikh sovereignty? This question is not so easily answered. The notion of sovereignty was articulated differently in the mobilization of the *darbār* ideology in the pre-colonial period in comparison with colonial and post-colonial notions of sovereignty, when the nation-state comes the fore. The suzerain–vassal model of the Mughal state provides for a model of distributed sovereignty whereby elites and rulers entered into complex hierarchical relations with the state, while retaining aspects of sovereign control on the local level. Sovereignty itself in the pre-colonial period, in short, does not map to its modern national form and was not always exclusive. It is no surprise, then, to see that aspects of real political and economic control were realized by religious centers, such as Sufi *khānqāh* and Vaishnava institutions in Punjab and elsewhere. This can be seen across Mughal period domains: the history of the Vallabha *sampradāy* as Shandip Saha has described it in his recent work provides a compelling parallel (and also counter) example from the same period as the development of the Sikh Gurus’ court. Saha notes that “the successful growth of the Pustimarg ... lay in its willingness to integrate itself firmly

within the structure of both Muslim and Hindu regimes”. ([22], pp. 312–313) The leaders of the seven houses designated for the male descendents of Vittalnath, the successor of the founder of the *sampradāy*, Vallabhacharya, were known as *mahārājas* and achieved not only wealth but also even temporal control of extensive lands under the patronage of royalty in Rajasthan. In 1672, indeed, the descendants of Vitthalnath’s eldest son were granted a small autonomous kingdom within Mewar, ([22], pp. 304–305) such that, according to E. Richardson, “the goswamis exerted total control over commerce, local industry, and taxation. Nathdwara operated as a veritable vatican, levying fees on pilgrims who entered its gates, assessing all goods produced in the market place, and controlling the services instituted for the maintenance of the god”. ([20], p. ix)

The Mughal imperial context for the development of the Sikh tradition as a community and as a set of institutions and ideas, therefore, enabled participation in a complex network of distributed sovereign relations. Such relations had evolved over time, as Subrahmanyam argues, as an “evolving tool-box of contemporary statecraft, from which a set of institutions were improvised and partly innovated” in the time of Akbar, when the Mughal system reached mature development, drawing on prior precedents and continuing to change after Akbar’s time. ([26], p. 301) As Subrahmanyam notes, portrayals of the Mughal state range from those that portray a “Mughal Juggernaut, the medieval road-roller that reduced the sub-continent into an institutional flatland” to those that emphasize local control delegated from a loosely configured center. ([26], p. 321) It is not in the scope of this article to decide this question, but it is enough to consider how within a flexible and evolving Mughal state formation process local power centers could be configured in different ways in relation to Mughal power, such as is suggested by the Vallabhite community example. This would be only more so the case for a community with antagonistic relations with Mughal authority, as became the case with the Sikhs. The tenth and final embodied human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, therefore could be imagined as a sovereign leader within this larger

world. This sovereignty was primarily centered at the city of Anandpur, rather than a larger political entity equivalent to the much broader contours of the Sikh community, as is clear in Sainapati's *Gur Sobha* (1711). [17] At the same time, this sovereignty must be understood to work within a larger system of distributed political relations that at times emphasized centralization and at other times fostered the distribution of power in local centers, *within*, at the *periphery* of, and *outside* a larger imperial network. This is reflected in the entreaty of Guru Gobind Singh in his *Zafarnāmah* for justice from the Mughal emperor in terms that appeal to a shared moral and cultural universe. In doing so, it does not fully repudiate the overarching ideological underpinnings of Mughal rule, even as it challenges it. ([7], p. 212; [8], p. 96) At the same time, as Fenech's recent study of the *Zafarnāmah* has shown, the Guru also rejected a conventional sovereign-vassal relationship with the Mughal state; an argument is made here for an independent status within the prevailing political order. The possibility that such a position was akin to that given to other religious communities persists, as Fenech's reference to the "divine" aspects of the Guru's court make clear. ([8], pp. 82–84, 95–96)

The remembrance of the Guru period and the status of sovereignty, however, were to develop further with political developments in the eighteenth century that brought the Sikhs into direct political power. In texts of this later period, assertion of the political sovereignty of Sikh-led kingdoms prevails and is seen in direct relation to the intrinsic message of the Gurus. New understandings of sovereignty were then introduced with the onset of colonial rule, leading to a national idiom that now is accepted as normative.

### The Post-Mughal Period and the Political Ascendancy of Sikh Leaders

Centralized Mughal power declined in the eighteenth century such that Mughal authority persisted in sometimes solely ideological terms through to the nineteenth century. This context initiated a series of political changes in the Punjab

that allowed the ascendancy of Sikh and other forces, as Purnima Dhavan's work shows. [5] Even before the end of the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, centralized imperial Mughal power had begun to fracture at the peripheries, and successor groups began to vie for power. [1, 16] Many of the successor states that arose over the century however continued to pay allegiance to the Mughal emperor and/or continued many aspects of Mughal administration and culture, even when independent. The rise of Sikh-led states in Punjab in the later part of the eighteenth century, culminating with a large centralized state under Maharaja Ranjit Singh based at Lahore and strong smaller states in the eastern and southern part of Punjab (the so-called Phulkian states of Patiala, Kapurthala, and others, descended from a common ancestor Phul), reflects the Punjabi manifestation of this larger process. [25] Banda Bahadur, a follower of the tenth Guru, is credited with leading the first rebellions across Punjab in the early eighteenth century; by mid-century, Sikh and other leaders were in broad conflict with imperial and sub-imperial forces. When Banda Bahadur's forces were finally captured in 1715, their public parade was described by Mirza Muhammad in heroic terms: "There was no sign of humility and submission on their faces. Rather most of them, riding on the camels' backs, kept singing and reciting melodious verses". ([13], pp. 140–141)

Political disorder became acute in Punjab, as effective centralized Mughal imperial power disintegrated and multiple, both local and more distant challengers with imperial ambitions came to the fore. Nadir Shah's invasion in 1539 and the Sikhs' attack on his retreating army reflect this broader contest for power. The *chhoṭā ghallūghārā* of 1746, instituted by a Mughal functionary, Lakhpat Rai, in revenge for his brother's death at the hands of Sikh forces, reflects this larger political conflict and the rise of Sikh leaders as political contenders within it. Ahmad Shah Abdali's rise to power and accession of Nadir Shah's territories brought western parts of Punjab under his imperial control by 1757, when the Mughal emperor had ceded the province of Lahore together with Multan, Kashmir, and the *sarkār* of Sirhind. The Marathas set their sights on

Punjab as well; they were defeated by Abdali at Panipat in 1761. Punjab did not remain restful, however, in the hands of Abdali, and conflict with Sikh and other organized militias continued, leading to the *vaḍḍā ghallūghārā* or “great carnage,” when thousands of Singhs were killed in battle near present-day Ludhiana. Yet, amidst this turmoil and violence, Sikhs rose among a range of contenders to find a place within the shifting power formations of the mid-eighteenth century.

By 1765 a coin was struck in Lahore by the Sikh leaders of lineage-based *misals* or militias, reiterating the claim to sovereignty made earlier in this way by Banda Singh Bahadur. This sovereign presence would culminate in the establishment of the kingdom of Lahore under Ranjit Singh of the Sukerchakia *misal*, through military conquest and alliance building with other *misals*, in 1799. [15] (Coins, indeed, were struck throughout the end of the eighteenth century, as a central symbol of sovereignty ([12], p. 173 and n. 36).) The achievement of imperial ambitions under Ranjit Singh for some represents an exemplary Sikh form of sovereignty; for others, his rule was not informed enough by Sikh interests. Indeed, it is a common misnomer to call the Lahore state a “Sikh state.” While the idea of the Khalsa did inform the ideological underpinnings of the Lahore State, the polity never featured a Sikh majority population, and fundamental aspects of Ranjit Singh’s rule, such as policies toward the support of non-Sikh religious establishments, deny a simple equation of Sikh interests and the state. ([18], Ch. 5) At the same time, as Dhavan has shown, Khalsa communitarian ideologies challenged imperial aspirations in general terms. [5] Overall this moment represented the reversal of the fate of the Sikh community within prior imperial formations and the growth of a strong sense of the power of members of the community to determine its political place.

### The British Raj and the Complex Formations of Tradition

The coming of British rule in Punjab in 1849, 10 years after the death of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh and a tumultuous decade in which his heirs competed for control, brought yet another imperial context for the Sikh community. The East India Company’s attempts to define the Sikhs in political as well as religious terms began in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when British political agents sought to understand Sikhism in the context of comprehending the political formations of Ranjit Singh’s Lahore state. [3, 4] British imperial interests later came to depend on the maintenance of Punjabi and Sikh dominance in the army. Whereas before 1857 – which saw a broad rebellion explicitly aimed at Indian independence, called the “mutiny” by colonial sources – the Bengal army was dominated by higher-caste recruits from eastern India, the participation of Punjabis in the protracted battle to re-establish British control in the subcontinent at that time helped secure them a significant place in the military machinery of empire. Between May and December of 1857, approximately 34,000 Punjabis joined the British forces, including some who had been demobilized by the East India Company government previously. ([3], p. 64; [27], p. 46)

As Tan Tai Yong notes, “although British rhetoric at that time spoke of the Punjabis’ ‘splendid and noble response to the call of duty’, there were no illusions that the Punjabis had responded to the British call out of a sense of loyalty”. ([27], p. 47) Practical self-interest, particularly for Sikhs who had lost much in the transition from Ranjit Singh’s rule to that of the British, bound them to imperial interests. As this relationship further developed, the British positioned themselves as patrons of the Sikh community and of the Sikh religion, in that they encouraged particular definitions of being Sikh and enforced these definitions among the Sikh members of the British Indian armed forces. [9] At the same time, such enforcement also encouraged a narrowing in the definition of who was a Sikh, which promoted a sense that the Sikh community was in decline otherwise; this too served imperial interests, in that imperial patronage seemed all the more necessary.

Later, communal organization among Sikhs took place in a broader imperial context within which religious identity was instituted as a core governing principle of British imperial India,

through the designation of representative institutions designed to accommodate religious communities as fundamental social categories. [14] It is in this context that one must place the efforts of organizations like the Singh Sabhas, or “Singh Organizations.” The Singh Sabha movement was the site of the articulation of multiple visions of what it meant to be Sikh in the period. Competing visions arose among branches of these organizations into what Harjot Oberoi has identified as a conflict between a Tat Khalsa and a “Sanatan Sikh” perspective on the Sikh tradition. The latter, he argues, was open to an “enchanted universe” in which multiplicity and hybridity were the norm; the former was invested in articulating a bounded definition of being Sikh that denied commonality, in particular, with Hinduism. In this way, an “older, pluralist paradigm of Sikh faith was displaced forever by a highly uniform Sikh identity, the one we know today as modern Sikhism”. ([19], p. 25) Yet, in ways, this is an overstatement. There were limits on Tat Khalsa reformers, who sought to reconfigure and sharpen the definition of who was a Sikh, and diversity continued. Tony Ballantyne thus argues that the history of the migration of Punjabis in the same period, and the production of alternative visions of being Sikh in that context, cannot allow claims of victory for any one definition of being Sikh, as multiple identities were articulated and acted out during this time of reform and consolidation. The success of reform in rural areas was also limited. ([3], pp. 166–167 and Ch. 2) Prior pluralist visions of the definition of Sikhness thus remained. At the same time, the reformers themselves were diverse in their approaches.

The imperial context for these developments among Sikhs was formative. It allowed for increased communication and mobility, which in turn promoted awareness of the diversity of practices among and within religious communities. In some cases, this led to efforts toward homogenization. British imperial administrative innovations that depended upon religious identity as an organizing principle – such as the census and nascent representational governmental structures – also had a direct impact on the discourse of religious identity. At the same time, some of the

earliest formulations of an Indian nationalist vision emerged in diaspora, because of the common experience of racism felt there among South Asians. The *gadar* or revolutionary movement took shape on the west coast of the U.S.A and Canada, providing a vision of a secular, free India – and it was pursued primarily but not exclusively by Sikh migrants to these regions. Sikhs later continued to be active both in support of imperial governance – particularly as a powerful part of the army – and among nationalists. The language of the nation also came to directly influence Sikh communitarian formations, and it was in this context that there developed the imagination of a new kind of sovereignty, different from that which characterized the pre-colonial period, where the nineteenth-century ideology of the nation-state was mapped to the articulation of a Sikh *quam* or community/nation.

## Imperial Metaphors

The question of empire may in some senses seem moot today, in the wake of the achievement of independence in South Asia in 1947 and the development of new dominant international political players in the years since then. The experience of “American empire,” however, has been and remains very real, earlier in relation to the Soviet Bloc, for example, or more recently in the hegemony of multi-national corporate interests since the Soviet dissolution. Many of the most important transnational movements active today – many of them religious – themselves are formed by such imperial idioms. The imagination of a transnational community linked across time and space by interests of belief and practice in some ways mirrors such imperial ideologies – particularly those with agonistic relationships to the state, as is visible in the operations of transnational corporations. In other ways, such social formations run diametrically opposed to the imperial idiom, providing an alternative imagination of community and belonging that challenges a homogenized corporate/imperial vision and also cannot be mapped easily onto a single territorial entity. [24] The political context for any community is fundamental to the formation



of that community; it provides the conditions of possibility for it and the languages and experiences that can be expressed through it. In the Sikh case, South Asian and British imperial formations have profoundly shaped the tradition; at the same time, it surpasses them, toward new visions of community and subjectivity that are not contained in (and even subvert, for example in the case of egalitarian Khalsa-centric social formations) an imperial idiom.

## Cross-References

- Colonialism
- Dalip Singh, Maharaja
- Maharajah Ranjit Singh
- Modernity (Sikhism)
- Punjab

## References

1. Alam M (1986) *The crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
2. Alam M (2003) The culture and politics of Persian in precolonial Hindustan. In: Pollock S (ed) *Literary cultures in history: reconstructions from South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi/New York
3. Ballantyne T (2006) *Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world*. Duke University Press, Durham/London
4. Dhavan P (2011) Redemptive pasts and imperiled futures: the writing of a Sikh history. In: Anne Murphy (ed) *Time, history and the religious imaginary in South Asia*. Routledge, London/New York
5. Dhavan P (2011) When sparrows became hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699–1799. Oxford University Press, New York
6. Dirks NB (1987) *The hollow crown: ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York
7. Fenech L (2008) *The Darbar of the Sikh gurus: the court of god in the world of men*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
8. Fenech L (2012) *The Sikh Zafar-nāmah of guru Gobind Singh: a discursive blade in the heart of the Mughal Empire*. Oxford University Press, New York
9. Fox R (1985) *Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making*. University of California Press, Berkeley
10. Gordon S (ed) (2003) *Robes of honour: khil'at in pre-colonial and colonial India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
11. Green N (2006) *Indian Sufism since the seventeenth century: saints, books and empires in the Muslim Deccan*. Routledge, London/New York
12. Grewal JS, Bal SS (1967) *Guru Gobind Singh: a biographical study*. Panjab University, Publications Bureau, Chandigarh
13. Grewal JS, Habib I (2001) *Sikh history from Persian sources* (trans: Irfan Habib). Tulika and Indian History Congress, New Delhi
14. Jones K (1981) Religious identity and the Indian census. In: Barrier NG (ed) *The census in British India: new perspectives*. Manohar, New Delhi
15. Major A (1996) *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the mid – nineteenth century*. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi
16. Marshall P (2003) Introduction. In: Marshall P (ed) *The eighteenth century in Indian history: evolution or revolution?* Oxford University Press, New Delhi
17. Murphy A (2007) History in the Sikh past. *Hist Theory* 46(2):345–365
18. Murphy A (2012) *The materiality of the past: history and representation in Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, New York
19. Oberoi H (1994) *The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Oxford University Press, Delhi
20. Richardson EA (1979) *Mughal and Rajput patronage of the bhakti sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640–1760 A.D.* PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, Arizona
21. Rinehart R (2011) *Debating the Dasam Granth*. Oxford University Press, New York
22. Saha S (2007) The movement of Bhakti along a North-West axis: tracing the history of the Pustimarg between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Int J Hindu Stud* 11(3):299–318
23. Sen S (1999) Imperial orders of the past: the semantics of history and time in the medieval Indo-Persianate culture of North India. In: Ali D (ed) *Invoking the past: the uses of history in South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 231–257
24. Shani G (2008) *Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age*. Routledge, London
25. Singh B (1993) *A history of the Sikh Misals*. Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala
26. Subrahmanyam S (1992) The Mughal state – structure or process? Reflections on recent western historiography. *Indian Econ Soc Hist Rev* 29(3):291–321
27. Yong TT (2005) *The Garrison state: the military, government and society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947*. Sage, New Delhi

## Sikhs in the British Empire

- Sikhs and Empire

---

## Simran

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)
- 

## Sin

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)
- 

## Singh Sabha

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)
  - [Vir Singh \(Bhai\)](#)
- 

## Singh Sabha/Reform Movements

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Definition

A socioreligious reform movement led by prominent Sikhs during the colonial period under British rule.

### The Singh Sabha Movement

The progression of colonial rule in Punjab after the region's annexation by the British in 1849 led to a prolonged engagement between British military and political administrators and influential members of Punjab major socioreligious groups including the Sikhs. While there were a myriad of experiences and interactions, the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries alongside the tacit, but at times open, support by the British

colonial machine is one which led to a large degree of anxiety across the broad swath of Punjab's cultural map. [2, 5, 6] This anxiety around proselytization had already created indigenous responses in other regions through mechanisms of reform. The onus of these reform movements was to purify what suddenly seemed to be an unmanageable amalgam of beliefs. One such movement was the Arya Samaj which was founded by Swami Dayanand during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and promoted a form of monotheism situated in a reading of the Vedas, the ideals of asceticism, caste and correct ritual conduct amongst a majoritarian politicoreligious group which was rapidly coming to the fore under the sign of Hinduism. In Punjab, the Singh Sabha movement was as much a response to the failed attempt at working alongside Arya Samaj supporters as it was a response to a political crisis which arose out of the British annexation. [6, 7]

Initially, Dayanand was welcomed by some Sikhs who found his monotheistic and anticaste stance appealing. But this admiration was short lived as Dayanand made harsh and disparaging comments about Guru Nanak. Sikhs soon realized that Dayanand and the organization he had created in Punjab, the Arya Samaj, was an even greater threat to them than Christianity, as it was part of a massive and rising Hindu consciousness throughout India which tended to regard Sikhs and Sikhi as a minor sect of Hinduism. Feeling threatened, Sikh leaders convened meetings in Amritsar to oppose Dayanand's influence. These meetings culminated in the founding of a body called the Sri Guru Singh Sabha in 1873. This association marks the beginning of the most important voluntary body in Sikh history, a body that evolved into a movement whose success was premised on an engagement with the British state and with modernity per se. It is through the agency of this modernizing movement, the Singh Sabha, that the path of Sikhi originated by the Sikh Gurus, also known as the Sikh Panth, was further concretized into a "religion" that came to be known as Sikhism. [1, 3, 4, 6, 7]

The first Singh Sabha, the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, was founded in 1873 in Amritsar as a response to several different problems which faced the Sikhs at the time. The Amritsar Singh Sabha was set up and backed by conservative Sikhs belonging to the Khatri caste, many of whom were descendants of the early Sikh Gurus. They included men such as Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a direct descendent of Guru Nanak, Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia, Avtar Singh Vahiria and Giani Gian Singh, a noted Sikh scholar of the time. The conservatism of this Amritsar-based group stemmed from the fact that they saw the Sikh Panth as one among the myriad streams constituting *sanatana dharma*, the so-called eternal tradition that identifies its source of authority as the Veda. These self-styled “*Sanatan Sikhs*” can be traced to those groups that refused to take Khalsa initiation on the grounds that the *khande-ka-pahul* ceremony polluted their ritual boundaries and threatened their caste status which they regarded as primary. Though they resented the democratic tendency within the Khalsa groups, they continued to coexist within the broader Sikh Panth even as they remained aloof from the mainstream Khalsa practices. Never relinquishing their claim to be natural leaders of the Panth, they regained their social prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by taking over the main gurdwaras and other institutions vacated by the Khalsa Sikhs in their fight for survival against the Mughal state in the eighteenth century. Doctrinally, the “*Sanatan Sikhs*” considered Guru Nanak to be an incarnation or avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu and thereby aligned Sikh traditions with the Brahmanical social structure and caste ideology. Thus, the predominant concern of the conservative “*Sanatan Sikhs*” was to protect the kind of social framework in which they had been nurtured. However, their understanding of the Sikh tradition would become increasingly problematic as it furthered the attempts by members of the Arya Samaj to continue to claim that Sikhs were a minor subset of larger Hinduism. In this way, the ideology supported by the *sanatan*

members quickly came into conflict with political exigencies of the day. [3, 4, 6]

The conservative ideology of the Amritsar Singh Sabha invited stiff opposition within the Panth. This came primarily from Sikhs who had strongly upheld the core Khalsa ideals and had benefitted from Western education and employment in such a way that they were in a position to challenge the traditionalist elites represented by Khem Singh Bedi, Avtar Singh Vahiria, and Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia. They styled themselves as *Tat Khalsa*, or advocates of the authentic Khalsa ideals after the *Tat Khalsa* of the eighteenth century. These *Tat Khalsa* Sikhs, led by men such as Gurmukh Singh, Harsha Singh Arora, Jawahir Singh, and Giani Ditt Singh became increasingly vocal in their opposition to the “*Sanatan Sikhs*” and formed another branch of the Singh Sabha in Lahore in 1879. [1, 3, 4, 6, 7]

Following the lead of the Lahore Singh Sabha, many other Sabhas were formed throughout Punjab. By 1899, there were Singh Sabhas in every town and in many villages. Each of these associations modelled themselves either on the Lahore or Amritsar model. However, the Lahore Singh Sabha proved to be far more successful than its rival, to the extent that the term “*Singh Sabha*” eventually became synonymous with the Lahore group which was the dominant force in the modernization of the Sikh tradition. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the two bodies eventually merged into one, the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD), partly due to the need for greater political coordination in the face of a more powerful common adversary, namely, the Arya Samaj as the main representative of political Hinduism in Punjab. [4, 6, 7] Indeed the nature of the Singh Sabha’s activities and the character of its modernizing zeal cannot be properly understood without acknowledging that it was primarily, if not entirely, a response to the transformation of the term “*Hindu*” from its original connotation as non-Muslim inhabitants of India, to the master signifier of a specifically religious identity embodied by the

entity “Hinduism.” What made this transformation threatening for the Sikhs was that it provided Hindus with a form of identification not only at the provincial level (where they already outnumbered Sikhs) but at the pan-continental level, effectively making India synonymous with “Hindu” and “Hinduism”. [3]

Accordingly the Singh Sabha’s main activities focused on reviving an authentic Sikh consciousness on the Tat Khalsa model. Much of their activity took place over a period of about 50 years between the 1870s and 1920s. In the early phase between the 1870s and late 1890s the collective energies of some of the key reformist figures (such as Gurmukh Singh, Giani Ditt Singh, Mohan Singh Vaid, Bhagat Lakhshman Singh, Giani Hazara Singh, Kahn Singh Nabha, and Bhai Vir Singh) were focused on: (i) redefining popular rituals and practices and distinguishing “Sikh” from “Hindu” or Muslim practices and redefining an authentic Sikh praxis based on the Khalsa initiation and codes of conduct and (ii) setting up schools and colleges in towns and villages. Through the creative use of print media including tract publications and newspapers such as *Gurmukhi Akhbar* (Punjabi) and *The Khalsa* (English), these new leaders of the Singh Sabha were able to evolve a general consensus about the authentic nature of Sikh identity. They all agreed that the source of authentic Sikhi was the early Sikh tradition, specifically the period of the Sikh Gurus and immediately after. This tradition was embodied in authoritative Sikh literatures such as the *Adi Granth*, the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh (in the *Dasam Granth*), the works of Bhai Gurdas, selected *janamsakhis*, the *Gurbilas* literature, and the *Rahitnamas*. Practices deemed un-Sikh included the worship of idols, the worship of superstitious cults such as Sakhi Sarvar, Gugga Pir and Hindu deities, their incarnations, marriage ceremonies conducted according to Vedic rites and officiated by a Brahmin. Authentic Sikh practice meant receiving Khalsa initiation, the adoption of the 5 K’s and the names “Singh” or “Kaur.” More

importantly, Sikh rites of birth, death, and especially marriage came to acquire great importance. Sikh parents were encouraged to send their children to Khalsa schools where the teaching of Punjabi and Gurmukhi was compulsory. [3, 6, 7]

Having been educated in Anglo-Vernacular mission schools, the Singh Sabha reformers were aware, however, that the success of such an extensive program of social reform depended on their ability to create a systematic corpus of literature that could provide doctrinal and historical elements necessary to persuade an increasingly literate Sikh populace. Central to this endeavour was the ability to interpret the meaning of Sikh scripture. True, there already existed a tradition of scriptural exegesis. [6, 8] However, a great deal of this material had been influenced by Brahmanical philosophy that helped to sustain the conservative culture of the “Sanatan Sikhs.” The *Nirmala* and *Udasi* schools had risen to prominence primarily because of the Khalsa’s preoccupation with the quest for political power in the last decades of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Udasi* and *Nirmala* scholars were routinely patronized by Sanatan Sikhs, the Sikh nobility or were employed as *granthis* at Gurdwaras. From the Singh Sabha perspective, the *Udasis* and *Nirmalas* interpreted Sikh scripture from within a Brahmanic framework making it easy for the *Arya Samajis* to claim Sikhi as a reformed Hindu sect. Thus, the efforts to renew the understanding of Sikh scripture and to recapture the original spirit of the Sikh Gurus’ teaching became a cornerstone of their mission. This effort was conceived as a long-term project whose outcome would be the publication of a detailed series of commentaries on Sikh scripture. [3, 6]

Although the Singh Sabha scholars wrote and published mainly in their native Punjabi language, there were some important collaborations with British Indologists that led to publications in English. The most important of these was the six-volume study of Sikh history and scripture by Max Arthur Macauliffe published in 1909 by

the Clarendon Press. Unlike Trumpp, Macauliffe opted to disperse translated hymns from Sikh scripture within traditional narratives of the lives of the Sikh Gurus. Working closely with Kahn Singh Nabha and other Sikh *gianis* in the 1890s, Macauliffe's expressed aim was to controvert Trumpp's main charge that Sikhi was a mere pantheism and to reinstall it within the history of religions as an indigenous monotheism of India. But as Macauliffe himself admitted, even though his narrative faithfully mirrored the views of his Sikh reformist collaborators, the conceptual terminology of his critique of Trumpp was ultimately conditioned by the very schema used by his predecessor. No one, wrote Macauliffe, "has succeeded in logically dissociating theism from pantheism," thereby suggesting that the moment when Sikh scripture is translated into a European language, must coexist in a terrain where all talk of religion or of God is automatically routed through categories of (Christian) philosophical theology. Thus, the only difference between Macauliffe and Trumpp's translations was the position that each attributed to Sikhism in the evolution of religions, which for Macauliffe was a fully-fledged theism, and for Trumpp a pantheism or amoral atheism. Macauliffe's translation helped the reformists to satisfy their desire – denied by Trumpp – to prove a sufficiently exalted idea of God in the Sikh scriptures. For reformist intellectuals, ultimate fulfillment of this desire could only be attained by proving that such an idea of God already existed within their own scripture and in its native language. [3, 6, 8]

By the middle of the twentieth century, Sikh intellectuals had begun to produce theological material which took works such as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* as a model. These new exegetical works packaged the essence of Sikh thought (*gurmat*) into a creedal form that: (i) provided in native Punjabi a very succinct access to a schema that could be reproduced with equal facility by Sikhs writing in Punjabi or English; (ii) by doing so it armed Sikh publicists, literary figures and preachers with an accessible

creed that could be rapidly deployed to combat other creeds (Hindu, Muslim, Christian); and (iii) it provided a way for later generations of Sikh scholars, especially those writing in English, to materialize a "Sikh world view," and on the basis of this "world view" to locate itself within the discourse of "world religions." Indeed, it would be safe to suggest that this corpus of reformist publications was instrumental in transforming an amorphous Sikhi into the more concrete, boundarified entity that we today call Sikhism. [3–6, 8] Once this partly imagined, partly real entity Sikhism had come into view, it was possible to reformulate a Sikh code of ethics and conduct. However, this document was not ratified by the Sikh community until 1951 when the official Sikh Code of Conduct or Sikh *Rahitmaryada* was published. With the publication and ratification of the Sikh *Rahitmaryada*, the Sikhs finally had a document that spelled out its core "Beliefs and Practices" and outlined its "world-view." It represented the culmination of almost seven decades of work by Singh Sabha scholars. The monumental intellectual achievements of Singh Sabha period are essential to understanding Sikhism, the formation which the modern Sikh tradition takes in the twentieth century, partly because it used the bimodality of translation to speak the language of the discourse of "religion" at once to the British colonial rulers as well as to the Sikh masses.\*

## Cross-References

- [Khalsa](#)
- [Sikhi](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

\*Earlier versions of this entry have appeared in Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (2009). *Religion and the Specter of the West*. New York: Columbia and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (2013). *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury.



## References

1. Ashok SS (1974) Panjab dian Lahiran. Punjabi University, Patiala
2. Fox R (1985) Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making. University of California Press, Berkeley
3. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
4. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
5. Mir F (2010) The social space of language: vernacular culture in British colonial Punjab. University of California Press, Berkeley
6. Oberoi H (1993) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Chicago University Press, Chicago
7. Singh G (1973) The Singh Sabha and other socio-religious reform movements in the Punjab. Punjabi University, Patiala
8. Van der Linden B (2008) Moral languages from colonial Punjab: the Singh Sabha, the Arya Samaj, and the Ahmadiyyas. Manohar, Delhi

---

## Singh Sabhas

- [Orientalism \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Snana

- [Samskara \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Sri Akal Takht Sahib

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

---

## Sri Darbar Sahib

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

---

## Sri Harmandir Sahib

- [Blue Star \(Operation\)](#)

---

## Supna

- [Dreams \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Syllogism

- [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Symbols

- [Symbols \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Symbols (Sikhism)

Jasjit Singh  
Department of Theology and Religious Studies,  
University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

## Synonyms

[Sikhism](#); [Symbols](#)

## Definition

The importance of symbols in the Sikh tradition.

## Main Text

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “symbol” has its roots in the Greek *symbolon* meaning *mark* or *token* and the Latin *symbolum* meaning sign, creed, or religious belief. Indeed, the Latin *symbolum* was originally used by Christians to denote the Apostle’s creed (*Symbolum Apostolorum*), a statement used to distinguish Christians from non-Christians. While symbols are now used to describe a wide variety of objects including fashion labels, company logos, and

mathematical concepts, the origin of the term “symbol” as a marker of distinction between religious groups continues to be relevant today. This discussion will firstly focus on how symbols are used in the Sikh identity to distinguish Sikhs from other groups, before moving on to examine how symbols are used in Sikh iconography.

## Symbols and Sikh Identity

No matter what their family background or personal level of religious adherence, Sikhs of all ages learn that they were given their external identity on the harvest festival day of Vaisakhi in 1699 by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. ([1], p. 51) According to Sikh tradition on this occasion, the Guru gathered his Sikhs together and asked for five volunteers who would be willing to give their lives for their faith. The Guru then initiated these five into the *Khalsa* or the “community of the pure” by bestowing them with *Amrit*, the “nectar of immortality,” which is prepared by stirring sweets into water while reciting five compositions from Sikh scripture. These five initiates became known as the *Panj Pyare*, or “five beloved ones,” and were instructed by the Guru to adopt five outwardly symbols known as the five Ks, because the Punjabi name for each item begins with the letter “K”:

- *Kesh* (uncut hair)
- *Kangha* (comb)
- *Kachcha* (cotton breeches)
- *Kirpan* (sword)
- *Kara* (steel or iron wristband)

These five symbols are now gifted to any Sikh who undergoes initiation and joins the *Khalsa*, with those doing so becoming known as *Amritdhari* or “those who have taken Amrit” Sikhs. Although all five symbols are of equal importance, it is the *Kesh* or uncut hair which is often regarded as the main symbol of the Sikh faith ([2], p. 39) given that many noninitiated Sikhs also keep the long hair and turban and are known as *Kesdhari* or “those who keep hair” Sikhs. Although both *Kesdhari* and *Amritdhari*

Sikhs may have the same external appearance, the distinction is that *Amritdhari* Sikhs have made a conscious decision to undergo initiation and have been specifically instructed to wear all five Ks at all times.

*Amritdhari* Sikhs are instructed to keep their hair uncut and tidy using the *Kangha*, or small wooden comb. As with all symbols, the meaning which a symbol is given depends very much on the particular social context in which the symbol evolved. Consequently, the way in which Sikhs manage their hair must be understood in the context of hair symbolism in seventeenth-century Punjab. The long hair, controlled by the *Kangha*, and tied in a topknot represents discipline and holiness and is distinct from the shaven head of the Hindu, the cut hair of the Muslim, and the uncontrolled hair of the yogi. ([3], p. 27) This idea of “disciplined holiness” runs through all of the five Ks with the *Kachcha*, a loose-fitting boxer-short-styled garment representing the importance of living a faithful householder’s life and of always being ready for engagement on the battlefield, whether this be an actual battlefield in seventeenth-century Punjab or a metaphorical internal battle with one’s vices. Many scholars argue that this garment was developed in response to the *dhoti*, a piece of clothing worn by the general populous which took the form of a long piece of cloth usually wrapped around the wearer’s body which was uncontrolled and not suited for horse riding. ([1], p. 53)

Sikhs often describe the *Kara* or iron wristband which is worn on the right or left arm depending on the laterality of the individual as a “handcuff to the Guru” which acts as a reminder to the wearer to ensure that all deeds performed are deeds which the Guru would approve of. Some scholars note that the *Kara* may have originated as protection for the sword arm, as well as being a weapon in itself. Nevertheless, for many Sikhs the *Kara*’s circular shape also acts as a reminder of the infinity of the Divine and reminds the wearer to be humble, given that the *Kara* is usually made of iron or steel, metals not usually viewed as being ostentatious. Indeed, although the *Kara* is often described as a bangle, it is important to note that it is not a piece of jewelry, a fact used in a legal case

in the UK [4] in which a school lost its case banning a Sikh girl from wearing her *Kara* to school.

Although the martial aspects of the *Kirpan*, the sword, are obvious, this symbol is often described as being a reminder to Khalsa Sikhs to always be prepared to fight against oppression and for the rights of the poor and weak. The word *Kirpan* is often explained as having derived from the Punjabi word *Kirpa*, meaning gift, highlighting that the *Kirpan* is to only be used as a gift and never imposed. Sikhs living in the Diaspora have regularly had to fight for the right to wear the *Kirpan* and have spent time and resources to educate non-Sikhs that it is only *Amritdhari* Sikhs who are allowed to wear the *Kirpan*.

It is clear therefore that the five Ks would have distinguished early *Amritdhari* Sikhs from the rest of society in which they lived. Indeed, Sikh tradition notes the development of these symbols in the context of the martyrdom of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, noted that few Sikhs had been brave enough to come forward and claim the head and body of his father and therefore sought to ensure that Sikhs would always stand out in a crowd consequently providing them with a distinct identity through the five Ks.

Although the five Ks are an important part of the Sikh identity, the fact that estimates regarding the number of *Amritdharis* in the Sikh population range at around 15 % ([5], p. xxviii) has meant that many more Sikhs wear the turban than the five Ks. Consequently given its historical status in Indian society as a marker of respect, it is the turban which has become most linked with Sikhs. Although the turban has traditionally been viewed as being mandatory for Sikh men, and optional for Sikh women, some Sikh groups are challenging this status by prescribing the turban as mandatory for both genders. For the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, the Keski (a small turban) is presented as being one of the five Ks in place of the *Kesh* which they also maintain. Similarly, Sikh women belonging to the “Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere” sport white turbans like their male counterparts, and those who follow the code of conduct prescribed by Damdami

Taksal are also instructed that the Guru’s command is for both men and women to wear turbans. ([6], p. 212)

The fact that Sikhs sport these external symbols has meant that wherever they settle in large numbers, they soon begin to assert for the right to wear these symbols, usually beginning with requests to wear the turban and then moving on to the *Kara* and *Kirpan*. The success with which Sikhs manage to negotiate the wearing of these symbols is dependent on a number of factors including the relationship between religion and the state as demonstrated in the case of the UK where there has been a historical relationship between the Sikhs and the British through the colonial encounter. As Sikhs continue to settle all over the world, this struggle to wear these symbols will continue, being as they are, the mainstays of the Sikh identity.

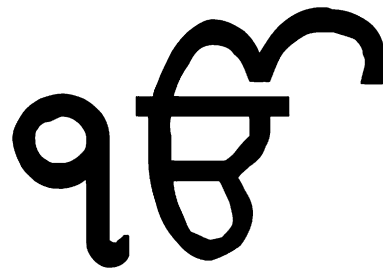
## Sikh Iconography

In terms of iconography, two symbols above all others are regularly used in Sikh worship and practice, the *Ik Onkar* symbol and the *Khanda* symbol. Both are found in Sikh Gurdwaras and homes and are regularly used on clothing, books, and other memorabilia related to Sikhism.

### Ik Onkar

See Fig. 1

The “*Ik Onkar*” symbol appears at the very start of the Guru Granth Sahib and is part of the Mool Mantar or “root statement” of the Sikhs. Although *Ik Onkar* is often translated as “There is one God,” many translators are beginning to



**Symbols (Sikhism), Fig. 1** The Ik Onkar symbol

challenge this Semitic understanding of monotheism as belief in one God in favor of Guru Nanak's idea of a universal oneness of creation. ([1], p. 23)

The *Ik Onkar* symbol itself is made up of two parts, the number one, or Ik in Punjabi (ੴ), and the symbol Onkar (ੴ) which represents the ultimate reality. Using the number one emphasizes the completeness of Onkar and that Onkar is single, unique, and absolute. This emphasis on oneness must again be considered in context of the presentation of the predominant tradition of Hinduism as a polytheistic tradition further demonstrating the use of symbols to differentiate one tradition against another.

### The Khanda

See Fig. 2

The roots of the other regularly used symbol of Sikhism, the *Khanda*, are not as clear as those of *Ik Onkar*. What is known, however, is that this symbol constitutes two swords, a quoit and a central double-edged sword, also known as a *Khanda*. Today, the *Khanda* is a key symbol of Sikhism and is found on the *Nishan Sahib*, the bright orange flag which is flown outside most Sikh Gurdwaras.

The four constituent parts of the *Khanda* each have their own meaning, contributing to the wider meaning of the *Khanda* symbol. The two curved

swords symbolize the concept of *Miri/Piri* a concept introduced by the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Hargobind. Guru Hargobind used to wear two swords symbolizing spiritual authority (*Piri*) and temporal authority (*Miri*) emphasizing the importance of personal and societal responsibility. The central quoit, like the *Kara*, symbolizes the oneness of the Divine as does the *Khanda*, the central double-edged sword, which is also used to stir the water when preparing *Amrit* for the Sikh initiation ceremony.

### Conclusion

It is clear that symbols play an important role within Sikhism both at an individual level and also for adherents to the faith as a whole. As has been demonstrated, it is important to understand the context in which symbols developed in order to fully understand their evolution, with both the symbols in the Sikh identity and those comprising Sikh iconography having developed in the context of the practices of the main other traditions of the time, Hinduism and Islam. In this regard the importance of understanding symbols cannot be underestimated as it is the symbols of a religious tradition which are often used as the main markers of distinction between themselves and others.

### Cross-References

- [Amritdhari](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)

### References

1. Nesbitt E (2005) *Sikhism: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
2. Singh G (2000) Importance of hair and turban. In: Singh M (ed) *Sikh forms and symbols*. Manohar, New Delhi, pp 39–44
3. Olivelle P (1998) Hair and society: social significance of hair in south Asian traditions. In: Hildebeitel A, Miller BD (eds) *Hair: its power and meaning in Asian cultures*. SUNY Press, New York, pp 11–49



**Symbols (Sikhism), Fig. 2** The Khanda symbol

4. Lipsett Anthea (2008) Sikh schoolgirl wins bangle court case. Guardian, Tuesday 29 July 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/jul/29/schools.religion>. Accessed 27 May 2011
5. McLeod WH (2009) The A to Z of Sikhism. Scarecrow Press, Lanham
6. Singh J (2010) Head first: young British Sikhs, hair, and the turban. *J Contemp Relig* 25(2):203–220
7. Hildebeitel A, Miller BD (eds) (1998) Hair: its power and meaning in Asian cultures. SUNY Press, New York
8. Singh H (ed) (1996) The encyclopaedia of Sikhism, vol 2. Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Mohinder S (2000) Sikh forms and symbols. Manohar, Delhi
10. Peter S (2005) Symbol and symbolism. In: Jones L (ed) Encyclopedia of religions, 2nd edn. Macmillan, New York

---

## Synthesis

### ► Logic (Sikhism)



# T

---

## Takhat

► [Takhts](#)

---

## Takhata

► [Takhts](#)

---

## Takhts

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Takhat](#); [Takhata](#)

## Definition

In the Sikh tradition, takht is an exalted seat from which authoritative and binding decisions are made. There are five such seats situated across the subcontinent of South Asia: (1) Akal Takht, Amritsar (2) Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur (3) Takht Sri Harmandar Sahib, Patna (4) Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo (5) Takht

Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib, Abchal Nagar, Nanded.

## The Divine Seat

Takht, literally meaning royal seat or throne, was typically a platform with an umbrella-like covering upon which royalty and Emperors sat in order to take audiences. The takht was a ceremonial position from which lesser-kings or the Emperor would go about the prescribed duties of kingship, which included listening to the grievances of their subjects and making decisions about irresolvable disputes amongst rival factions. [4] This was in distinction to “*arsh*” or “*al-kursi*,” the divine throne upon which Allah sits in paradise awaiting the Day of Judgement. [2]

In the Sikh tradition, references to takht are found in the Guru Granth Sahib and in the poetry of Bhai Gurdas. In the Guru Granth Sahib, terms like *sacha-takht* (the true and everlasting throne) signifies the divine throne from which God will dispense justice but it also means creation itself as well as the creator. The use of the term *sacha* in conjunction with takht imbues a degree of timelessness to the divine principle which occupies the throne. Bhai Gurdas refers to *sadh sangat*, or community of believers, as the takht. These notions show that the divine essence pervades creation, including humans, and sustains it. [1, 3] These notions bear semblance to similar notions that are put forth in the Qu’ran, in *Surah*

*al-Baqarah* 2:255 which is commonly referred to as “Ayat al-kursi” there is a description of Allah as an eternal and self-subsisting entity who sits upon a throne which extend over all of heaven and earth –herein heaven and earth can be taken to the entirety of creation. Within both usages, the notion of throne is very literal and yet simultaneously takes on a degree of metaphorical interpretation through its associations. [2]

The notion of this divine seat is temporalized in two ways in the Sikh tradition. First, by placing the Guru Granth Sahib upon a takht when it was placed at the center of Harmandar Sahib by Guru Arjan, the fifth Nanak, in 1604 and again when his successor, Guru Hargobind built a raised platform for this investiture as Guru in 1606. This platform was referred to as the Akal takht or timeless throne. A building was eventually built around the throne which was initially referred to as the Akal bunga, however, the entire structure in lay parlance came to be known as the Akal takht. Both of these endeavors are attempts to temporalize, if only temporarily, and demystify the notion of divine justice –to bring back into the world of creation the position of that which created it and pervades it. [1] There were increasing theological attempts to construct an idea of divinity which was radically separate from its creation; however, the Sikh perspective was that while the divine cannot be circumscribed by creation and must be beyond creation, it simultaneously is one with creation and exists: the divine is a living timeless principle, *akal murat* or *al-Haiyyu*.

## The Institutionalization of the Takht

While residing in Amritsar, Guru Hargobind used the Akal takht as a place from which to conduct duties related to the needs of the community of Sikhs, to receive offerings, issue edicts (*hukamnamas*) to distant congregations, and to listen to the songs of the Dhadis (bards). The Guru would also host tournaments in the open space between the Harmandar and Akal takht. Guru Hargobind’s presence at the Akal takht mirrored the cycles of presence and absence of the Guru Granth Sahib within the Harmandar.

This served to give the precincts a vestige of temporal and spiritual authority. [1, 3]

Guru Hargobind would flee Amritsar due to continuing tensions with the Mughal authorities and be forced to resettle in Kiratpur in the late 1620s. None of the remaining Sikh Gurus would spend any appreciable time at Amritsar and the city would come under the influence of rival claimants from the Sodhi kinship group which sought to gain benefits from being born into the family of the Sikh Gurus. Therefore, it is unclear what role the Akal takht played after Guru Hargobind’s departure from Amritsar until Bhai Mani Singh reclaimed the sacred space on behalf of the Khalsa. From that point onward it is clear that the takht became a central institution in the evolution of the Sikh community. Four more takhts were established by the Khalsa, all of which were connected to pivotal events which occurred during Guru Gobind Singh’s life. These four later takhts are: (1) Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur where the Khalsa was created; (2) Takht Sri Harmandar Sahib, Patna which is the birthplace and childhood home of Guru Gobind Singh; (3) Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo where Guru Gobind Singh spent nine months regrouping after a time of intense turmoil in 1706; (4) Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib, Abchal Nagar, Nanded sits at the place where Guru Gobind Singh passed away in 1708. [3, 4]

With the inclusion of the Akal Takht contemporary Sikhs have five takhts or ultimate seats of authority. Each of these is run by a *jathedar* or president who should be initiated into the Khalsa and have dedicated his life to espousing the ideals taught by the Sikh Gurus. The jathedar has replaced the role occupied by Guru Hargobind in relation to the concerns and needs of the Sikh sangat; however, the jathedars do not typically occupy an actual throne. The Guru Granth Sahib would occupy its throne in each of these individual places. Initially, these five institutions were regarded as equally authoritative in regards to decisions regarding the community. However, with the change wrought by the Sikh Gurdwaras Act which divided the Sikh community politically and religiously, the Akal Takht has been granted far greater authority in modern Sikhism and is

housed in what is thought of as “the religious capital” for Sikhs. It is the jathedar of the Akal Takht alone who can call a general assembly of the entire body of Sikh (*sarbatt Khalsa*) and he alone is able to issue binding hukamnamas who take precedence over those issued by the four other takhts. [1, 4] Further to the secular division between religion and politics, jathedars of all four takhts will refrain from commenting upon any political issues or controversies unless it touches upon matters of religion in all other circumstances they will refer the matter to the Shiromani Akali Dal, the leading Sikh political party. This practice is in variance with the earlier practice of not only Guru Hargobind but it is anathema to the functioning of the Khalsa which was to preside in worldly affairs through groups of five as it was said that the Guru exists wherever there is five Khalsa –by this logic it would require that the leadership of these five thrones coordinate with one another and consider the common good to decide on both political and religious matters. The functioning of such a system would be closest to the notion of the creator’s throne (sacha takht) which pervades creation found in the Guru Granth Sahib. [3, 4]

## Cross-References

- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Dilgeer HS (1980) The Akal Takht. Punjabi Book, Jalandhar
2. Khan ‘AM (2001) Shah Jahan aur uska Takht-i-Taus. La’in Publishers, Lahore
3. Nabha KS (1999) Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
4. Singh H (1998) Takht. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala

## Takseem

- [Bhagti \(Bhakti\), Sikhism](#)

## Tat Khalsa

Randeep Hothi

Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Khalsa](#)

## Definition

Pure/Unalloyed Khalsa.

“Tat Khalsa” has been used to refer to primarily two movements within the Khalsa. [2, 3]

The early eighteenth century, Tat Khalsa movement arose from the accusations of Khalsa commander Banda Singh Bahadur fashioning himself as a Guru, resulting in the majority of the eighteenth-century Khalsa refusing allegiance to his authority. [2] This group has been referred to as the Tat Khalsa, as opposed to the Bandai Khalsa which would remain loyal to Banda Singh Bahadur even after the mass execution of the Bandai Khalsa and Banda Singh Bahadur himself in Delhi, June 1716, by the governor of Lahore Abdus Samad Khan.

The historian Rattan Singh Banghoo, writing in 1841, understood the Bandai Khalsa to have adhered to the innovations of the “Fateh Darshan” address in lieu of the traditional “Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh,” a primarily red attire in lieu of the traditional navy blue color of the Khalsa, but most importantly the adherence to Banda Singh Bahadur as the Guru of the Sikhs. [4] As hostilities between the post-1716 Bandai Khalsa and mainstream Khalsa came to a crescendo, the two factions agreed to settle the conflict by deferring to the Guru in order to avoid heavy casualties on both sides. Having written their respective address on bundled paper dipped into the pool of Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, it was understood that the divine will would be indicated by the flotation of the prevailing party’s

salutation. As a result, for the most part, the Bandai Khalsa re-joined the ranks of the Tat Khalsa and no longer claimed Bandai identity. [4]

However, the genealogy of the term Tat Khalsa remains unclear, and it is not certain when the term gained prominence. Note that Rattan Singh Bhangu uses the term thrice. He describes a conflict between the Tat Khalsa and Banda Singh Bahadur, who was stationed in Lahore in the first passage: [4]

Pg. 354

ਅੱਖੋਂ ਬਹਾਦਰੋਂ ਖੈ ਜੋਏ ਕਹਯੋ |

(While) the Khalsa Singhs who kept putting up in their camp at Amritsar,

They came to be known by the name of Tat Khalsa

Pg. 355

ਖੈ ਕਹਯੋ ਕੈ | ਜੋ ਕ ਇ ਪੰਥ ਕੋ ਹੈ ਪ |

The Singhs of the Tat Khalsa (mainstream) faction sent a message,

That they were no longer dependent on Banda Singh's support.

They claimed that (the Guru) who was the real master of the Khalsa Panth,

Always resided among them (in body and spirit)

Pg. 431

ਖੈ ਜੋ ਹੈ ਖਡਗ | ਗੁਰੂ ਦੱਖ ਹੈ ਕਹ |

Those alone are entitled to call themselves Tat Khalsa,

Who have no fear of being killed or fighting in war.

Tat Khalsa refers to this movement immediately before and after his death in 1716 and is used as a term marking orthodoxy and setting it apart from countermovements within the Khalsa. Otherwise, the term Khalsa is used to refer to the initiated Sikhs who are Amritdhari.

The secondary usage of the Tat Khalsa appellation refers to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform movements that drew inspiration from the eighteenth-century Khalsa, specifically Lahore Singh Sabha reformers for whom the eighteenth-century Khalsa prior to the rise of Ranjit Singh represented the golden age of Sikh ethos. [3] The Lahore Singh Sabha, founded in 1879, was the primary locus for Tat Khalsa thought. Here, Sikh intellectuals, such as Gurmukh Singh, Dit Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, and Kahn Singh Nabha, drew heavily from this history to reorganize Sikh identity and political power. [2] In returning to the Khalsa as the primary locus of inspiration, the

Tat Khalsa was able to organize Sikh laity into rejecting what were considered significant influences of Hindu, Muslim, and popular religious conventions and rituals. [2, 3] In this context, Tat Khalsa is also understood as an ideology employed by the Singh Sabha reformists.

## Cross-References

- [Banda Bahadur](#)
- [Colonialism](#)
- [Singh Sabha](#)

## References

1. Gerald Barrier N (2004) Authority, politics, and contemporary Sikhism the Akal Takht, the SGPC, Rahit Maryada, and the Law. In: Gerald Barrier N, Singh P (eds) Sikhism and history. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
2. McLeod WH (1995) Historical dictionary of Sikhism. Scarecrow Press, London
3. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries. Oxford University Press, Oxford
4. Singh K (2006) Sri Gur Panth Prakash. Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh

## Teeka

- [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Tegh Bahadur (Guru)

I. J. Singh

New York University, New York, NY, USA

## Definition

Guru Tegh Bahadur is the ninth Sikh Guru.

## Ninth Sikh Guru

Born Tyag Mull in Amritsar on April 1, 1621, Tegh Bahadur was the fifth and youngest son of

the sixth Sikh Master, Guru Hargobind. From boyhood, he was of a contemplative, meditative, and mystic bent, attracted to music and poetry. His retiring nature was in keeping with the meaning of his name. [1, 6, 11]

Two renowned Sikhs of that time tutored the young Tyag Mull: Bhai Buddha imparted skills in arms, archery, and horsemanship; Bhai Gurdas taught him the depths of Sikhi as well as the religious texts of other Indic religions. [2, 3]

From the time of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Nanak, Sikhs had maintained a standing militia, including a cavalry. Guru Hargobind and the Mughals who ruled India engaged in four pitched battles and some skirmishes in 1634 and 1635. Chronicles record Tyag Mull, though barely 13, fully participated in this warfare and acquitted himself most honorably, earning the title by which he is known – Tegh Bahadur, “Master of the Sword.” [4]

After his father Guru Hargobind passed the mantle of guruship to Har Rai, the seventh guru, Tegh Bahadur moved to his mother’s ancestral village, Bakala, and spent much of his time in reflection and meditation. Guru Har Rai anointed his young son Harkrishan as the next guru who served very briefly. During much of Guru Harkrishan short tenure, Tegh Bahadur was away on a lengthy tour of eastern India, far from Punjab. [3, 12]

Tradition and history state that Guru Harkrishan on his deathbed pointed toward the village of Bakala and to Tegh Bahadur in very cryptic words: “Baba Bakale.” As the search spread, as many as 20 pretenders surfaced. Tegh Bahadur made no attempts to assert his claim but stayed quiet and meditative, withdrawn from all the jockeying for the position of guru. His identity, according to traditional writings, was revealed by a trader, Makhan Shah Lubana. [8, 9]

This did not satisfy some rival claimants to guruship, especially Tegh Bahadur’s own nephew, Dhir Mull. Guru Tegh Bahadur was shot and his house ransacked by Dhir Mull’s men who also took with them the only copy of the *Adi Granth* available to the guru. Note that this *Adi Granth*, with the addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s writings, was

anointed as the Guru Granth in 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh. [4, 10]

When Sikhs heard of it, they pillaged Dhir Mull’s house, recovered everything stolen, and brought it back.

But Guru Tegh Bahadur responded forgivingly. He returned everything including the copy of the *Adi Granth* to Dhir Mull. The guru said: “Forgiveness is the supreme virtue that transcends all the pilgrimages and absolutions.” But this divide between the followers of Dhir Mull, and the House of Nanak was neither forgotten nor healed. It persists even today.

Tegh Bahadur was formally anointed guru on August 11, 1664. He set out to knit the far-flung pockets of Sikh communities into a whole by his travels, teachings, and practices. He was in Assam when news reached him that his wife, who was awaiting him in Patna, had given birth to their son, Gobind Rai, who later became the tenth guru, Gobind Singh. Some chronicles give his name at birth as Gobind Das. [4, 7, 12]

On one of his trips, the Dowager Rani Champa of Bilaspur offered the guru a tract of land in her state that Guru Tegh Bahadur bought on payment of 500 rupees. The guru founded a township “Chakk Nanki” named after his mother that later, by the time of the tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, had become the historical city of Anandpur. [13] (Compare this to the price early settlers paid the Native Americans for Manhattan Island in New York City. It was only \$24 and some trinkets.)

The guru and his family returned to their home at Chakk Nanki that soon became the site for a history-making, life-changing event. History states that on May 25, 1675, a representative group of Brahmins from Kashmir appeared at the guru’s door. Their tale of woe was heartrending. The Mughal Governor, Iftikhar Khan, consistent with Emperor Aurungzeb’s desires and directives, was forcing Kashmiri Hindus to convert to Islam or face death. They entreated the guru to intercede.

According to Kuir Singh, [8] when the guru’s son, Gobind, who was only 9 years old at that time, asked his father why he looked so thoughtful, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s response was mind-blowing then and appears equally so today; he



said, "Such are the times and their burdens. This matter would be redeemed only if a truly good person comes forward to lay his head on the line." "Father, who could be worthier than you?" asked young Gobind.

Soon, orders were issued for the guru's arrest by Emperor Aurungzeb. The guru traveled out of Punjab toward Delhi to court arrest. History affirms that on July 12, 1675, he was arrested at Agra, though Kesar Singh Chhibber and Mohammed Ehsan Ijad suggest that he might have been arrested near Chakk Nanki on that day. [9] Four days earlier, on July 8, he had nominated Gobind to succeed him as guru.

For over 3 months, Guru Tegh Bahadur suffered harsh treatment in jail; he was then transported in an iron cage to Delhi, where he reached on November 4, 1675. He was tortured and repeatedly asked to accept Islam. Neither physical torture nor the promise of worldly pleasures would budge him. He was asked to perform a miracle to prove his divine powers and he declined.

On November 11, 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded in *Chandni Chowk*, a bustling central marker of Old Delhi.

Gurdwara Sis Ganj stands at that spot today as a prominent reminder of his sacrifice for the rights of Hindus to practice their faith as they saw fit. The guru was not a Hindu, but the principle of "freedom of religion" was at stake here. In larger terms, this was a matter of human rights and freedom of conscience. [6]

His body and head were left lying in the public square as a warning to others. At nightfall, Lakhi Shah Lubana smuggled his headless body, hid it in his bullock cart, and rushed home with it. Open cremation would have looked suspicious to the rulers, so he set fire to his house with the guru's body in it. Gurdwara Rakab Ganj now marks the spot. The head was similarly lifted by Bhai Jaita who secretly carried it to Anandpur where the new guru, Gobind, cremated his father's head on November 16, 1675 and honored Jaita. [10, 13]

Thus did the seeds of speaking truth to power planted by Guru Nanak take root, mature, and bloom into open rebellion against religious intolerance and despotic governments of the day.

Nearly five centuries later, Guru Tegh Bahadur continues to be remembered all over India as "*Hindi Chadar*" or protector of dharma and the weak. [1]

Guru Tegh Bahadur's contribution to *Guru Granth* is small and was likely entered into it by Guru Gobind Singh. He wrote 59 shabads in 15 raagas and 57 shloks; Guru Tegh Bahadur is the only guru to have composed shabads in Raga *Jaijivanti*. [9, 14]

Guru Tegh Bahadur's writings remind one of the Stoic attitudes to life on how to deal with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. [14] Two citations from the *Guru Granth* (page 1,427) provide an essence of his views on a productive, meaningful life; translations in English are modified after Trilochan Singh et al. [15]:

The first citation:

"*Sukh dukh jeh parsai nahi, lobh moh abhiman;  
Kaho Nanak sun reh mana, so moorat Bhagwan.*"  
Not cast down by sorrow, nor over-elated in joy;  
Aloof from pride, greed and coveting.  
Such a man says Nanak; is the image of God.

Second citation:

"*Bhai kahu ko det nahi, nahi bhai maanat aan;  
Kaho Nanak sun reh manaa, gyani tahay bakhaan*"  
He who frightens none, nor himself fears any:  
Such a man, says Nanak, set him among the wise.

## Cross-References

► [Guru](#)

## References

1. Banerjee AC (1996) Guru Tegh Bahadur. In: Harbans S (ed) The encyclopaedia of Sikhism, vol IV. 329–324 pp
2. Bhalla SD (1971) Mahima Parkash. Patiala, Reprinted
3. Bhangu RS (1914) Prachin Panth Parkash. Amritsar
4. Chhibber KS (1972) Bansavli Dasa(n) Patshania(n) Ka (Ed: R.S. Jaggi). Chandigarh
5. Gyan Singh G (1970) Prachin Panth Parkash. Patiala, Reprinted
6. Harbans S (1982) Guru Tegh Bahadur. Delhi
7. Kahn Singh N (1974) Mahaan Kosh (Punjabi). Languages Department Punjab, Patiala, Reprinted
8. Kuir S (1968) Gurbilas Patshahi X. Patiala, Reprinted
9. Macauliffe MA (1909) The Sikh religion. Oxford

10. Padam PS, Giani GS (eds) (1986) *Guru Kia(n) Sakhia* (n). Patiala
11. Piar S (ed) (1976) *Guru Tegh Bahadur*. Amritsar
12. Santokh Singh B (1937–1935) *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*. Amritsar
13. Sukha S (1912) *Gurbilas Dasvi(n) Patshahi*. Lahore
14. Trilochan S (1967) *Guru Tegh Bahadur: Prophet and Martyr*. Delhi
15. Trilochan S, Jodh S, Kapur S, Bawa Harkishen S, Khushwant S (1966) *The sacred writings of the Sikhs*. UNESCO

---

## The Adi Granth

► [Guru Granth Sahib](#)

---

## Thesis

► [Logic \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Time

► [Calendar \(Nanakshahi\), Sikhism](#)

---

## Time (Sikhism)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

[Juga](#); [Kaal](#); [Yuga](#)

## Definition

The theme of time pervades numerous hymns in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Time is the period over which the human psyche undergoes a process of

constructing mortal experience by separating ego and nonego. This process can be reversed through a process of perfecting ones consciousness through the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

## Time and the State of Oneness

The *Guru Granth Sahib*'s authority and influence on the Sikh way of life is due partly to the fact that the hymns directly testify to the poetic experiences of the Sikh Gurus and partly because the central message of these hymns is existential/experiential rather than epistemological/transcendental. The Sikh Gurus experienced and exhorted their followers to experience a state of Oneness. This state of Oneness, however, is not the experience of a transcendental, eternal deity (monotheism) but an experience of oneness that is strictly within the horizon of life and death or mortality. [2]

Because human consciousness is a construct of mortal experience, the requisite state of Oneness is realized through the process of perfecting ones consciousness. Paradoxically, though, such perfection involves recognizing and imbibing into one's consciousness a fundamental imperative (*hukam*) that is inscribed within the nature of all existence and mirrored by the structure of the human ego. [3, 4] Thus, the recurrent message in the *Guru Granth* is to experience Oneness by reuniting the two halves of the psyche (ego- and nonego), which become separated due to effect of time. To recognize *hukam* is to realize that the very element in which separation and unification can take place, is time.

Not surprisingly the theme of time is one of the most pervasive in Sikh scripture. However, the Gurus do not treat time as a category or entity distinct from the phenomenal world and from existing beings. The reason for this is that time can only be known as "*aporia*," an irresolvable contradiction, where each moment disappears in the very moment that it appears. As such time itself escapes the subject–object opposition generated by egocentrism. Time is simultaneously subjective and objective. [1, 2, 5] For example, ordinarily we think of time as a static grid or a screen on

which subjects appear to move between set coordinates, e.g., from past to future. From this dualistic perspective, time is perceived as always out there, someone else's time, but never "my time." To collapse this dualism, Guru Nanak adopts the well-rehearsed strategy of shrinking the entire passage of human life into a single night, depicting the night's progression in terms of infancy, childhood, youth, old age, and finally death.

*A momentary guest, man comes into this world to  
sort things out.*

*But the fool is trapped by worldly greed  
Till, seized by death, he repents when he departs.*

*The reaper, when he come, cuts both ripe and  
unripe,*

*He makes his preparations, picking up his scythe,  
For once the farmer orders, the crop is cut and  
weighed.*

*The first watch is wasted on busyness, the next in  
sleep,*

*The third in idle talk, and in the fourth dawn breaks,  
The One from which life springs is never once  
remembered.*

To the person who refuses to confront the true nature of time as impermanent here and now ("one dies of course, but not me, not yet"), the Gurus project the true nature of time as one's own mortality that is always already there and cannot be deferred. Through this depiction one is existentially confronted with the presence of death here in this very moment of my existence. Reversing our normal everyday understanding, the Gurus show how, from the perspective of impermanence, the usual secure optimism of daylight and the waking state turn out to be illusions, whereas night and the dreaming state are better indicators of reality. [1, 2] The nature of time as the ultimate equalizer of fortunes is evident in many hymns which show that if one rises, one must ultimately fall, irrespective of whether that happens in one's own lifetime or after one's death, as portrayed below in Shaikh Farid's austere verse:

*Umbrella-shaded kings, whose praise  
Their bards to drum beats cried,  
Are gone to clumber in their graves,  
With orphans at their side.*

While ordinarily people lament the passing of time, grieving for things lost, and suffering pain

when attachments are broken, the Guru teaches that attachment and suffering result only from the ego's habitual obstruction of the natural flow of time. By accepting time's impermanence as our own essence and seeing every attempt to control time as ultimately illusory like the waves of the sea, which are here one moment, gone the next, one can be released from suffering which the Gurus refer to through the metaphors of the cycle of births and death. But if one learns to cultivate a mindfulness of *hukam* through the practice of constant remembrance of the Name, one can learn to renounce self-attachment as the insidious obstacle to time's constant becoming. [3, 4] With the obstruction removed, the mind is freed from its self-imposed bindings, from its immersion in the cycle of birth and death, and from the anxiety of being born into one life form after another. This liberation from the cycle of birth and death indicates the liberation from mundane notions of repetitive or successive cycles of time. [4, 5]

## Cross-References

- [Death \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Philosophy](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University, New York
2. Mandair A (2013) Sikhism: a guide for the perplexed. Bloomsbury, London
3. Nabha KS (1999) Hukam. In: Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh. Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh
4. Singh A (1970) Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala
5. Singh H (1998) Akal. In: Encyclopedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## Transcendental Meditation

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

## Transnationalism

- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)
- [Migration, Sikh](#)

## Transnationalism (Sikhism)

Michael Hawley  
Religious Studies, Mount Royal University,  
Calgary, AB, Canada  
Religious Studies, University of Calgary, Calgary,  
AB, Canada

### Synonyms

[Diaspora; Globalization](#)

### Definition

Transnationalism is the network(s) and process (es) of relations between groups across geopolitical boundaries.

### Forms of Transnationalism and Sikh Scholarship

Transnationalism is a multivalent term. It is often used synonymously with “diaspora” and with “globalization,” though some have sought to distinguish and to interrogate them. [9] Transnationalism has been used in a variety of ways to frame, to conceptualize, and to interpret relations between diasporic groups. The existing body of scholarship in the field has produced six discernible meanings of transnationalism, each of which is represented in this growing subdiscipline of Sikh Studies. [15]

First, transnationalism has been used to account for “a kind of social formation spanning borders.” [19] The sociological and anthropological focus of this type of transnationalism is “ethnic diasporas.” [17] Transnationalism in this sense is concerned with documenting and interpreting the “triadic

relationship” between the collective identity across the diasporic community, the “host” context, and the “homeland.” [19] In this sense, transnationalism is occupied with migrants and migration, with patterns of settlement history, and with the ensuing social and cultural negotiation that takes place within and across the diasporic community. Until recently, this (and the “multiple identities” lens below) has been the dominant paradigm for understanding Sikh transnationalism. This type of transnationalism is often reflected in the “Sikhs in. . .” genre: “Sikhs in Britain,” [16] “Sikhs in Canada,” [2] and “Sikhs in Latin America” [8] are representative examples of this approach. Comparative Sikh transnationalism of this kind has discerned common patterns of response across sociocultural “host” (i.e., geopolitical) space such as the disintegration of plural identities in favor of homogenous identity based on “religion.” [10]

Second, cultural studies frame transnationalism as a “type of consciousness” in which transnational subjects are marked by dual or multiple identities. [19] Closely related to the sociocultural adaptation approach above, this approach foregrounds identity, both individual and corporate, as an interstitial, liminal, yet pluralistic self-understanding on the part of the diasporic subject. The scholarship documenting the plurality of Sikh diasporic communities in Europe, for example, has highlighted the complexity and context specificity of issues surrounding “home,” identity, religion, authority, and multiple belongings. [3–5, 7] More recently, the “multiple identities” of transnational subjects have been underwritten by the role of gender. As Navtej Purewal argued in her study of Sikh philanthropy, the Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara in Birmingham is a center of economic and political mobilization for philanthropic activity while at the same time “transmitting and perpetuating institutions of gendered roles, norms, and hierarchies.” [12]

A third meaning of transnationalism can be seen as “a mode of cultural reproduction” in which transnationalism is “associated with a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices” which are “described in terms of syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation and hybridity.” [19] In the Sikh

context, *bhangra* is an exemplary form of transnationalism. *Bhangra* “fusion” is indicative of “third culture” Sikh youth who attempt to reconcile the first culture of the parents with the second culture of their “host” culture. [20] But the production and spread of *bhangra* has not merely given rise to “hybridity,” but its transnationality has engendered new associations between culture, territoriality, and identity. [13, 14]

Fourth, transnationalism is also an “avenue of capital”. [19] Vertovec highlights the role of transnational corporations which operate across geopolitical borders to create new pipelines for transnational activity. [19] In the Sikh context, the transnational flow of goods and monetary resources is accounted for (at least on the macrolevel) by Manuel Orozco’s five Ts: tourism, transportation, telecommunications, trade, and transmission of monetary remittances. [18] While the latter remain largely undocumented since large sums come through “informal channels” such as family, friends, and kinship networks, “remittances play a complex yet vital role at the household, community and regional levels.” [18]

They have an enormous potential to transform and improve rural livelihoods by raising living standards, providing access to health care and education, and by empowering communities whose economic welfare is threatened by the indifference and bureaucratic politics of the local state. This is particularly the case in Punjab with its continuing fiscal crisis and consequent cutback in expenditure on rural development. [18]

Transnationalism is also a “site political engagement” in which questions about local and global issues can be “properly posted, debated, and resolved.” [19] Recently, this fifth form of transnationalism has been effected through technology with its “rapid and far-reaching forms of information dissemination . . . enhancement of public participation and political organization, and lobbying intergovernmental organizations.” [19] Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropic initiatives from nonresident Indians (NRIs), however, are illustrative of a more established form of Sikh transnational political engagement. Closely linked to transnationalism as an avenue of capital, NGOs and NRI philanthropy

do not fit well into a national discourse and function beyond its parameters. At the same time, NGO and Sikh philanthropists can influence and have influenced national governmental policy. [6] For example, in her study of medical philanthropy in Punjab, and in particular the case of the Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust (GNMMET), Margaret Walton-Roberts highlights the process of “mobility and connectivity. . . across . . . political units. . . that permit the international movement of people.” [21] However, as Walton-Roberts cautions, there is a balancing act between too much philanthropy such that it results in the withdrawal of state funding. [21] This kind of Sikh transnationalism is often motivated by a sense of charity, nostalgia for “homeland,” and a desire to reinvent and to rewrite it the diasporic imaginary, even as it becomes a site of contest over “modernity,” “secularism,” and “demands of the state.” [21]

Transnationalism has also come to denote the (re)construction of a “place” or locality. This form of transnationalism is not so much “transnational” as it is “translocal” as a result of increased mobility, communications, and information sharing. [9, 19] Such “translocality” foregrounds the specific contexts (legal, political, cultural) and the creation of new “social fields” [19] whether empirical or virtual. However, the emergence of new social fields, and in particular those electronic ones (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), has given rise to a “disjuncture” between place, subjectivity, and social agency. [1, 11, 19] It has, therefore, become increasingly difficult for some to relate to or to produce “locality.” [19] “Translocal” Sikh “disjuncture” and negotiation is reflected in a series of short critical reflections on the Oak Creek tragedy [15] whose authors attempt to create space (locality) through confronting the seemingly ubiquitous rhetoric of nation, equanimity, and liberalism in post-911 America.

## Cross-References

- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)
- [Migration, Sikh](#)



## References

- Appadurai A (1990) Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Publ Cult* 2(2):1–24
- Basran GS, Singh Bolaria B (2003) *The Sikhs in Canada: migration, race, class, and gender*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Dusenbery VA (1981) Canadian ideology and public policy: the impact on Vancouver Sikh ethnic and religious adaptation. *Can Ethn Stud* 13(3):101–119
- Dusenbery VA (1988) Panjabi sikhs and Gora Sikhs: conflicting assertions of sikh identity.” In: O’Connell T, Israel M, Oxtoby WG (eds) with McLeod WH, Grewal JS (guest eds) *North America in Sikh history and religion in the twentieth century*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, pp 334–355
- Dusenbery VA (1990) On the moral sensitivities of Sikhs in North America. In: Lynch OM (ed) *Divine passions: the social construction of emotions in India*. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 239–261
- Dusenbery VA, Tatla DS (eds) (2009) *Sikh Diaspora philanthropy in Punjab: global giving for local good*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Jacobsen KA, Myrvold K (eds) (2012) *Sikhs across borders: transnational practices of European Sikhs*. Bloomsbury, London
- Kahlon SS (2012) *Sikhs in Latin America: travels among the Sikh Diaspora*. Manohar, Chandigarh
- Levitt P (2010) Transnationalism. In: Knott K, McLoughlin S (eds) *Diasporas: concepts, intersections, and identities*. Zed Books, New York, pp 39–44
- Leonard K (2007) Transnationalism, diaspora, translation. *Sikh Form* 3(1):51–66
- Mishra S (2013) The underbelly of diaspora criticism. In: Hawley M (ed) *Sikh diaspora: theory, agency, and experience*. Brill, Leiden (in press)
- Purewal N (2009) Gender, *seva*, and social institutions: a case study of the Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara and charitable trust, Birmingham, UK. In: Dusenbery VA, Tatla DS (eds) *Sikh Diaspora philanthropy in Punjab: global giving for local good*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 205–215
- Roy AG (2010) *Bhangra moves: from Ludhiana to London and beyond*. Ashgate Publishing, Surrey
- Roy AG (2013) *Band Le gandari* (Tie Up your bundle): unpartitioned memory cultures. In: Hawley M (ed) *Sikh Diaspora: theory, agency, and experience*. Brill, Leiden (in press)
- (2012) Reflections on the oak creek tragedy. *Sikh Form Relig Cult Theory* 8(3):273–331
- Singh G, Tatla DS (2006) *Sikhs in Britain: the making of a community*. Zed Books, London
- Tölölyan K (1991) The nation-state and its others: in lieu of a preface. *Diaspora* 1(1):3–7
- Thandi S (2006) Punjabi Diaspora and homeland relations. [http://www.india-seminar.com/2006/567/567\\_shinder\\_s\\_thandi.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2006/567/567_shinder_s_thandi.htm)
- Vertovec S (1999) Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethn Racial Stud* 22(2):447–462
- Warwick J (1995) Can anyone dance to this music?: Toronto’s Bhangra scene. *Bansuri* 12:5–17
- Walton-Roberts M (2009) Diaspora philanthropy in Punjab’s health sector: a transnational perspective. In: Dusenbery VA, Tatla DS (eds) *Sikh Diaspora philanthropy in Punjab: global giving for local good*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 184–204

## Truth (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

## Synonyms

Accuracy; Actuality; Exactness; Fact; Factuality; Genuineness; Legitimacy; Precision; Reality; Validity; Veracity; Verity

## Definition and Meaning of Truth

While explaining the meanings conveyed by the term “truth” it is told: “ (1) Conformity to fact or actuality, (2) A statement proven to be or accepted as true, (3) Sincerity and integrity. (4) Fidelity to an original or standard, (5) (a) Reality, actuality, (b) often Truth that which is considered to be the supreme reality and to have the ultimate meaning and value of existence.” [1] At some other place it is observed by a scholar, “Just as the truth of speech consists in the agreement or correspondence between what one says to another and what one thinks or says to oneself, so the truth of thought consists in the agreement or correspondence between what one thinks, believes or opines and what actually exists or does not exist in the reality that is independent of our minds and of our thinking one thing or another.” [2] According to another scholar, what is Truth? This question can be answered only “if we allow ourselves two metaphysical assumptions. . . . . first, that there are states of affairs, some of which occur or obtain

and some of which do not occur or obtain and second, that there are attributes or properties, some of which are exemplified or instantiated and some of which are not exemplified or instantiated.” [3] The “proposition” has been considered by the same scholar as a subspecies of the states of affairs. The propositions are, “those states of affairs, namely, which are necessarily such that either they always obtain or they never obtain.” [3] It is further observed that a proposition might be said “Is true, if and only if it obtains. And it is false if and only if it does not obtain.” [4] So, “Truth” is the property of a proposition. Every proposition is such that either it is true or it is false and no proposition can have both the properties of true and false. According to Bertrand Russell, “Truth is a property of beliefs, and derivatively of sentences which express belief. Truth consists in a certain relation between a belief and one or more facts other than the belief. When this relation is absent, the belief is false.” [5]

## Introduction

“What is Truth” has been explained and defined in the start. Truth is the English translation of the word *sach* in Punjabi language. Sach is the Punjabi form of the word *sat* in Sanskrit language. The word *sat* is a noun and its root in Sanskrit language is *asi*. The meanings implied by the word are being, existing, occurring, happening, being present, etc.. [6] Its adjective is *satya*. [7] In Hindu Dharam Kosh, *satya* has been held as that which remains the same in the three divisions of time that is past, present, and future. [8] In the Bani of Sri Guru Granth Sahib also, it is told by Guru Amar Das that the Truth never gets old and the Holy Name is never soiled. [9] At another place in the Bani, Guru Nanak confirms the same idea about *sach* while citing the example of the cloth. He says that after grinning and spinning of cotton, cloth is woven, beaten to bleach, and teamed to wash and then cut by the scissors, torn by the tailor, and stitched with needle and thread. Thus, through the Master’s praise the tattered honor is made whole if one lives a true life. As old it grows and tattered, with needle and thread is cloth patched, lasting not for

a month or a fortnight for a brief while may it last. Truth grows neither old nor tattered. Guru Nanak says that the all-holy Lord is manifest to the mind, while contemplation lasts. [10]

## Sach (Truth) in Sikhism

Sach has been used in three different meanings in Sikhism. On the first place such is an attribute of Reality. Secondly, such is the quality of a proposition which has got the capacity for guiding the conduct. Thirdly, such has been referred to as a moral virtue. So, in Sikhism, *sach* is concerned with the three areas: ontological, with the nature of Reality; epistemological, as a theory of truth or knowledge; and ethical, as a moral virtue. Here, the main concern is with *sach*, “Truth” in the meaning of Reality, the Being, though the reference will also be made to the other two aspects of *sach*.

As mentioned earlier, *sach* is the Punjabi form of Sanskrit word *satya*, the meaning of which is “to be” or “being.” According to an eminent scholar of Sikhism, the Prakrit form of the word *satya* in Sanskrit is *sachch* and its Punjabi form is *sach*. In Mul Mantra it is *sati*. [11] Interpreting “Sati Nam,” in Mul Mantra, the same scholar observes that the word *sati* here implies the non-dual *sati*. It is above *sat-asat* or *sach-jhooth* dualism and implies the meaning of “a conscious being whose form is truth.” [12] Another scholar of Sikhism has interpreted the meaning of the words “sat” and “sachiarā” after analyzing the various interpretations done so far by the scholars of Sikhism. He is of the opinion that the interpretation done by Max Arthur Macauliffe is more authentic. [13] According to him, the interpretation done by Macauliffe of Mul Mantra conveys the meaning of *sach* (true) as “being” or “eternal existence.” [14] After giving the views of the various Sikh scholars like Gopal Singh, Sohan Singh, Sodhi Teja Singh, etc., he further observes, “the term *sat* here has the same meaning which *satya* has in Bhagavata Purana where the opening verse is an adoration of the ultimate truth (*parama satya*)... . The essential (*svarupa*) definitive nature of God is said to be truth (*satya*). [15]

The above interpretation which has been offered by this scholar seems to be the most agreeable as it finds support from the other source named Brahman Sutra. In Brahman Sutra also sat has been taken for being. [16] In Vedanta system of Indian philosophy, the qualities of the ultimate Reality are said to be *sat-chit-anand*, that is, being, consciousness, and bliss. In the Chandogya Upanishad, it is held, “all creatures have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True.” [17] And “this ‘Truth’ is the highest Being.” [18] The difference between Sikh point of view has been very clearly brought out by one of the abovementioned scholars on Sikhism according to whom, “in Sikhism the Absolute has been conceived as dynamic and viewed functionally.” [19] He is of the opinion that “It is perhaps due to this inability of mere sat as truth to convey the dynamic creativity that Guru Nanak prefers to use sat nam, karta purakh.” [19]

Sach has been described also as having the capacity to guide the conduct of the seeker. According to Guru Nanak, sach is the panacea for the ills which afflict man. It washes the mind clean of all sins. Sach as a moral virtue is realized when the seeker bears truth in his heart, impurity of falsehood cast off, to truth is devoted in love, listening to the Divine Name, receives truthful instruction, seeks the holy Preceptor’s guidance, and take his fixed abode there. [20] Also, sach is realized as a moral virtue when the seeker disciplines the basic interests and cultivates the angelic aspect of his personality. [21]

*Gurvak* helps the seeker in realizing the Truth. It is a guide, the Pure which illumines the all with its light. Through its light the Reality is shown to the seeker. The world is afflicted; without truth it is involved in impurity and the Holy Name is the medicine. [22] Such a man who has attained truth is termed as *sacha* (*sachiar*) also, the true one, who is imbued with the Highest Truth, the Ultimate Reality. God’s light becomes manifest in him which leads to the abovementioned results. [23]

In the light of the whole discussion done so far about sach and its attainment, it becomes evident that to be sachiar means to realize the unity of the self with the sach or the Absolute Being. The seeker is to attain this unity not only through

reflection or contemplation on shabad or Bani but also through his actions. He has to discipline his life in the way of the Gurus. As opined by a Sikh scholar, “the ideal of all this discipline is to realize the pervasiveness of universal spirit in all and this is to be not only through gradual expansion of consciousness but it is also to be effectively translated in the actions of the self.” [24] It is through this that the concept of the Absolute as satnam karta purakh, the dynamic and creative aspect of Reality, as put forth by Guru Nanak, can be understood. That is why the ideal of Truth, according to Sikhism sachiar, is the highest achievement as told by Guru Nanak, “Truth is higher than everything but true conduct is higher than even truth.” [25] According to Sikhism, the ideal of truth cannot be attained in seclusion. It is to be attained through the participation in social life. Seclusion leads to escapism from the social responsibilities. But in Sikhism sachiar becomes more conscious of his social responsibilities and utilizes his knowledge for the improvement of the human society. [26]

According to Sikh philosophy, all creation and expansion done by the Reality is true. The Creator and the creation both are true. So are all the parts of the creative whole. [27] So it implies that all is Truth. There is no possibility of wrong and falsehood or evil in the Divine plan. Falsehood or evil exists only from the point of view of the finite creatures. But they also have the potentialities of transcending these weaknesses and attain the Truth. In Sikhism *haumai* (egotism) and *maya* are the wall of falsehood on the individual and cosmic plane, respectively. They give rise to many passions like *lobh* (concupiscence), *moh* (attachment), *vair* (avarice), *krodh* (anger), and *ahankaar* (pride) which separate man from the Reality. Haumai has been considered the basic malady but in it lies the remedy also. When man recognizes the negative role of the haumai within him, he can remove it, with the grace of God. [28] When it is removed, man has the knowledge of the Reality and the part is merged in the whole. Contemplation on the shabad unites man with the whole, God. The sachiar lives in the *nirmal bhau* only, but not in any other external fear. Nirmal bhau is aroused in his experience with God as

wonderful Lord, *Waheguru*. When he views the world as expression of the Ultimate Being and as the creation of the sach out of sach, he views everything as a part of the whole.

## References

1. Houghton Mifflin Company, Truth. In: The American Heritage dictionary of English language. Houghton Mifflin Company (updated in 2009)
2. Adler MJ (1997) Six great ideas. A touchstone book. Simon & Schuster, New York, p 34
3. Chisholm RM (1977) Theory of knowledge, 2nd edn. Prentice-Hall of India, Private Limited, New Delhi, p 87
4. Chisholm RM (1977) Theory of knowledge. Prentice-Hall of India, Private Limited, New Delhi, p 88
5. Russell B (1954) History of western philosophy. George Allen and Unwin, London, pp 164–165, fourth impression
6. Williams MM. Asi. In: A Sanskrit English dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi. Reprinted 1981
7. Vaman Shiv Ram Apte (1973) Satya. In: Sanskrit Hindi Kosh. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi
8. Pande R (1978) Hindu dharam kosh. Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, Hindi Samiti Parag, Lucknow, p 650
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sachu purana na thiai namu na maila hoe, p 1248
10. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sachu purana hovai nahi sita kade na patai. Nanak sahib sachu sachu ticharu kade na japai, pp 955–956
11. Singh BV (1961) Santhya Sri guru granth sahib, vol 1. Khalsa Smachar, Hall Bazar, Amritsar, p 38
12. Singh BV (1961) Santhya Sri guru granth sahib, vol 1. Khalsa Smachar Hall Bazar, Amritsar, p 12
13. Singh A (1970) Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 45
14. Avtar Singh (1970) Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 41 “But from what he quotes for comparison, namely an inscription from Greek temple, “I am all that was and is and will be, we may infer that perhaps the alternative meanings in his mind were in terms of ‘being’, or external existence”
15. Avtar Singh. Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 42
16. Radhakrishnan S (1960) The Brahma sutra (translation) George Allen and Unwin, London, p 90
17. Muller M. The Upanishads, vol 1. Dover, New York, p 90, First Asian publication 1979
18. Muller M. The Upanishads, vol 1. Dover, New York, p 101
19. Avtar Singh (1970). Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 45
20. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sach sabhna hoe daru pap kdhai dhoe, p 468, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
21. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. balihari gur apne dioharhi sad var. jin manas te devte kie karat na lagi var, p 463
22. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sansar rogi namu daru mail lagai sach bina. Gur vak nirmalu sda chananhu nit tirath manjna, p 1112, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
23. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sach gharu khoji lhe sachu gur thano, p 1112, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
24. Avtar Singh (1970). Ethics of the Sikhs. Punjabi University, Patiala, p 46
25. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sachahu orai sabhu ko upari sachu acharu, p 62, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
26. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. mithia tan nahi parupkara mithia basu let bikara, p 269, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
27. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. sache tere khand sache brahmand, p 463, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008
28. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. haumai diragh rogu hai daru bhi isu mahi, p 466, Shiromani Gurduara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, in August 2008

## Turban (Sikhism)

Pal Ahluwalia

Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation),  
University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth,  
Hampshire, UK

## Synonyms

[Dastaar](#); [Dumulla](#); [Keshkee](#); [Pagri](#)

## Definition

A head covering consisting of a long length of material wound around a cap or the head, worn especially by Sikhs and also by Muslims.

## Introduction

This entry outlines the centrality of the turban first, as a religious and cultural identity, and second as part of a modern aesthetic realm that constitutes certain kinds of political subjectivity. It is

important to note that one's world is not simply defined by a geographical space that happened to be the birthplace of the Sikh faith, namely the Punjab. What becomes relevant are the broad outlines and bare essences of forging a turbaned Sikh identity.

## The Sikh Turban

The factor most relevant for understanding notions of modern Sikh identity is ultimately related to the notion that the present characteristic form of the Sikh is a result of the tenth Guru's baptism (Amrit) of Sikhs in 1699 and the establishment of the Khalsa who must abide by a certain code of conduct. Guru Gobind Singh Ji established the tradition of "Khande da Amrit". As a member of the Khalsa, every Singh and Kaur is required to wear the five K's: *kesh* (unshorn hair), *khanga* (comb), *kesherea* (knee-length drawers), *kara* (steel bracelet) and *kirpan* (dagger). These five K's have come to define the very essence of a Sikh and have forged a distinct communal identity that provides a universal bond among Sikhs, regardless of ethnicity, all over the world. Although the turban is not spelt out in the five K's, it is nevertheless an integral part of the male, and in some cases female, Sikh identity. At least since 1699, if not earlier, Sikh males covered their heads with a *Dastaar* or *Keshkee* (small turban). It was part of the Sikh code of dress and Surinder Singh and Tarlochan Singh argue that the turban has significance for the following reasons:

- Holiness and spirituality
- As a robe of honor
- As a symbol of exchange and gift giving
- As a symbol of responsibility
- As part of the military tradition
- As a sign of high moral values
- As a symbol of identity

Most importantly, they cite a verse by Guru Gobind Singh Ji which illustrates the turban's centrality:

*Kangha dono vakt kar, paag chune kar bandhai*  
Translated: Comb your hair twice a day and tie your turban carefully, turn by turn. [4]

## The Standardization of the Sikh Turban

Although there is considerable conjecture as to what the turban looked like, it has been asserted that the present turban, albeit in its myriad of styles and variations, is a product of colonialism. In his book, *Colonialism And Its Forms of Knowledge*, Bernard Cohn, recounts the case of a G.S. Sagar, a turbaned Sikh who had been denied employment as a bus conductor with Manchester Transport on the grounds that he refused to wear the official uniform cap prescribed for employees. This case symbolized the "displacement of economic, political, and cultural issues, rooted in 200 years of tangled relationships between Indians and their British conquerors." ([2], p. 107) The irony of the Sagar case was, Cohn argues, that it was the British who had played a key role in making the turban a part of Sikh identity in the nineteenth century.

Amongst nineteenth century European and Indian artists, Cohn argues, two types of Sikh turbans were represented:

One was a tightly wrapped turban of plain cloth, which was either thin enough or loose enough on the crown to accommodate the topknot of the Sikh's hair. The second type of turban worn by the Sikhs in the early nineteenth century was associated with rulership. This turban was elaborately wrapped and had a *jigha*, a plume with a jewel attached, and a *sairpaich*, a cluster of jewels in a gold or silver setting. These ornamental devices were symbols of royalty, popularized in India by the Mughals. (109)

The decline of the Mughal empire witnessed the rise of the Sikh state under the leadership of Maharajah Ranjit Singh which eventually was conquered and annexed in 1849 by the East India company. The British, impressed with the "martial" qualities of the Sikhs, found them to be "perfect recruits for the Indian army." ([2], p. 109) Over time, the Sikhs became an integral part of the British army in India. By 1911, although the Sikhs were only one percent of the population, they



accounted for twenty percent of the army. It was in the army, Cohn argues, that the Sikh turban was standardized and made distinct from the Hindu and Muslim turbans:

This turban, large and neatly wrapped to cover the whole head and ears, became the visible badge of those the British had recruited. The Sikh turban and neatly trimmed beard were to stand until 1947 as the outward sign of those qualities for which they were recruited and trained: their wildness, controlled by the turban, and their fierceness, translated into dogged courage and stolid “buffalo-like” willingness to obey and follow their British officers. ([2], p. 110)

Cohn argues that the Sikh religious code did not prescribe the turban. Hence, the distinctive head dress of the Sikhs “was constructed out of the colonial context, in which the British rulers sought to objectify qualities they thought appropriate to roles that various groups in India were to play.” ([2], p. 110) This standardized military turban encouraged by the British over time became general amongst Sikhs. The turban, he points out, is no longer a symbol of loyalty to a military code associated with the British. Rather, it is now an important part “in the Sikh’s effort to maintain their unique identity in the face of hostility and pressure to conform to “normal” or expected dress in mass society.” ([2], p. 111) The evidence of this was clearly the Sagar case as well as the Sikhs’ battle to be exempt from motorcycle helmets and a plethora of cases that discriminated them on the basis of their unique head dress.

Whilst there is little doubt that processes of transculturation affect the culture of both the colonizer and the colonized, the suggestion that the present turban was an invention of the British colonial army is highly problematic. Furthermore, the idea of a neatly trimmed beard as a standardized British army identity is one that is easily challenged by a cursory glance at the images of Sikh regiments. What we have in Cohn is a continuation of a caricature of Sikh identity and orientalist representations that have been remarkably consistent. The assertion that the turban is represented as an outward sign to control the twin characteristics of “wildness” and “fierceness” are examples of the orientalist notions of Sikhs as a “martial race.” It is surprising that Cohn relies almost exclusively on

two Western sources Macauliffe 1909 and Macleod 1967, choosing to ignore a rich and diverse literature on Sikh history and religion based on far more nuanced research.

## Turbans, Identity, and Political Subjectivity

The turban is a mechanism to retain a Sikh identity whilst being inflected and influenced by the dominant culture. Dress is an important statement of identity and entails considerable political significance as well as coded cultural significance. As Malcolm Brown points out about the *hijab*:

One person whom I spoke to while doing ethnographic research in France told me, memorably, ... (the headscarf is not an item of clothing). On one level, of course, the *hijab* is an item of clothing. But we can already see that there are several levels which affect some of the ultimate questions of modernity and citizenship, inter alia questions of religion and secularization, the essence of the nation state, and the autonomy of the family. ([1], p. 107)

The turban is also, at one level, a simple piece of clothing but it entails and signals certain kinds of political subjectivity and forms of often-problematic citizenship. Dress, it is clear, is one of the most basic ways in which we are able to place not only ourselves but also others in the social world. As Goodrum has pointed out, clothes socialize the body into a cultural being:

Therefore the clothed body may be viewed as a cultural product central not only to a sense of self, but also crucial in the creation of conformity, a feeling of shared belonging and in fostering a national identity. ([3], p. 87)

It is clear that “techniques of fashioning the body are a visible form of acculturation in which identities are created, constructed and presented through the habitus of clothing.” ([3], p. 87) It is clothing that creates an ambiguous boundary that so often disturbs us. Given that the racialized body is itself highly problematic, the Sikh turban, that is so much more than a mere extension of the body, inextricably links the body to the social world but more importantly separates it from that world. As Wilson points out, “dress is the frontier between the self and the not self.” ([5], pp. 2–3)

## Conclusion

There are two dimensions to a Sikh identity that is manifested in the turban. These two dimensions are rooted in culture and religion. Sikh culture is by no means static. Rather, it is dynamic, traveling, and evolving constantly. Like clothing and dress, it has its roots within a particular cultural milieu. Concomitantly, it has a deeper, significant affiliation that deeply marks the Sikh body.

## Cross-References

- [Belief](#)
- [Colonialism](#)
- [Faith](#)
- [Khalsa](#)

- [Punjab](#)
- [Symbols](#)
- [Symbols \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Transnationalism \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Turban \(Sikhism\)](#)

## References

1. Brown MD (1985) Multiple meanings of the 'Hijab' in contemporary France. In: Wilson E (ed) *Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity*. Virago, London
2. Cohn B (1996) *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
3. Goodrum A (2001) Land of hip and glory: fashioning the 'classic' national body. In: Keenan WJF (ed) *Dressed to impress: looking the part*. Berg, Oxford
4. Singh S, Singh T (2001) Importance of Dastaar/Keskee (Turban). [www.interlog.com/~sikhs/turban.html](http://www.interlog.com/~sikhs/turban.html)
5. Wilson E (1985) *Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity*. Virago, London

# U

## Udasi(s)

Harjeet Singh Grewal  
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures,  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

## Synonyms

Udasin; Udasiye

## Definition

The term *Udasi* in the Sikh tradition represents a group of devotees who aggregated around Guru Nanak's eldest son, Baba Sri Chand or, simply, Sri Chand. There are two alternative words, *Udasi* and *Udasin*, used to describe the group devoted to Sri Chand; both words are thought to be related to a renunciate lifestyle and the practice of asceticism by its members. [1–3]

## Main Text

Historiographically, beginning with the suggestion found in Bhai Gurdas' *vars*, the Udasi sect is discussed largely in the context of a controversy within the burgeoning Sikh *panth*, or Nanak panth. The community had established itself in the village founded by Guru Nanak, Kartarpur, and the controversy was centered on the selection

of Bhai Lehna by Guru Nanak to be his successor and questions of primogeniture. The *gaddi*, or seat, of guruship was passed on and Bhai Lehna became Guru Angad. However, as Guru Nanak's first born son, Sri Chand was to inherit Guru Nanak's estate. The controversy which arose is thought to have virtually split the group of devotees that had amassed around the teachings and person of Guru Nanak. However, Angad would leave Kartarpur and set up a new community at Khadur. [1, 4, 5] The move to Khadur from Kartarpur, as well as Guru Angad's political acumen, prevented the succession issue from becoming a large schism in the community. However, the issues regarding succession would continue to plague the fledgling community, and the claims of Sri Chand's Udasi followers would factor heavily in such debates throughout the Guru Period. One aspect that seems to distinguish the rival claimants was what J. S. Grewal refers to as their "pro-establishment" stance. [6]

The pro-establishment stance seems to have enabled the Udasi order to be thought of as a heterodox movement in the later historiographical narrative. However, such claims as well as the notion of a staunch rift between Udasins and the other devotional groups that together comprised the early Sikh community may be overstated. One had to consider the continued relationship between the Sikh gurus and the Udasi sub-sect. A dialogue appears to have existed between these groups from the very beginnings with discussions between Guru Nanak and Sri Chand. From the

perspective of those who are neither outwardly antagonistic to the Udasi order, nor view it as a heterodox sect, it appears to be possible that the relationship was an amicable one. Although there may have been an intellectual disagreement, Guru Nanak supported his son's interest in Vedic learning as well as his asceticism to some degree. Baba Sri Chand's successor was Baba Gurditta, the son of the sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind. Baba Gurditta is remembered to have been sent to Baba Sri Chand by Guru Hargobind -an unlikely act if the Udasis were understood as a heterodox group at that time. There is evidence that the Udasis maintained relations with all Gurus until Guru Gobind vested the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* with the *gurgaddi*. Their influence spread during the Misl Period and the brief period of Sikh Rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. [1–3, 7] The nature of the relationship between the Sikh panth, the Sikh gurus, and the Udasin sect remains to be properly researched. Furthermore, it remains to be determined to what extent the intellectual disagreement between the two groups persisted as well as the vicissitudes and shifting claims between the groups over time. However, at the moment, it appears that the question of their authority and position within the Sikh community remains largely determined by a discourse established during the colonial period which persists within the postcolonial Sikh panth.

As the order became more established, it was split into two groups known as *dhunian* and *bakhshishan*. While the term *dhunia* is a reference to the physical establishments of the early ascetics through the maintenance of a sacrificial fire and smoke that would emanate from their “huts,” the term *bakhshish* seems to be related to the blessings the individual Udasis were given by separate Sikh gurus. The four individuals referred to as *dhunian* in connection with the six *bakhshishan* are collectively called the *dasnamian*. These men formed the core of the Udasi movement. [1, 4, 8, 9] These groups were associated with individuals who had fanned out across Panjab and much of Northern South Asia to spread Guru Nanak's teachings in both rural and urban areas. Unlike some Sufi groups, the Udasi were not averse to gaining political patronage through land grants. These grants were given to Udasi centers not only by the Sikh

chieftains, or other prominent and wealthy Sikhs, but by Mughal elites and Hindu Rajas. [9] The benefits of being open to receiving direct patronage allowed for a dynamic breadth and geographical reach across the Mughal Empire. Through such patronage, they gained political leverage and influence, but they were also beholden to their patrons to a larger degree than some of the more independent orders such as the Khalsa.

Despite their continual ties with the Sikh Gurus, the Udasis were never sought to assert an equivalent status with the gurus. Indeed, the need to distinguish between the Gurus and their hermeneutes seems to be emphasized in the early Sikh tradition – this can be seen in the amount of secondary texts they produced. [2, 10] It would appear that there may be some benefit of maintaining the perspective put forth by Mahindar Kaur regarding the Gurus being the *sirjanatmak*, or the creative, productive, event-driven impulse of the Sikh community and the Udasis forming the *viakhiatmak*, or explanatory intellectual heart of the community. [1] This view seems relevant considering the Udasis' proximity to the gurus and the sanction that seems to be given to their intellectual endeavors. However, the extent of this relevance becomes strained when the association with the Vedas is considered because there is no conclusive position given to the Vedas by the Gurus, whereas the Udasi explanations of *gurmata* at times stem from Vedic and/or Advaita Vedantic philosophy. [2, 11, 12] The degree to which these connections become strained, especially over the course of time after the Guru Period, can be seen in works such as the *Matra Bani* which is one Udasi text that discusses *gurmata* in relation to Advaita Vedantic thought. [2, 13] Another perspective on the Udasis has also been brought forth during the postcolonial period which tries to envision the Udasi order as a missionary group that was spreading the message of Guru Nanak. This interpretation becomes problematic due to its anachronistic reading as it is unclear how mechanisms of religious conversion functioned in the early Sikh community. [8] In regard to the intellectual legacy of the Udasis as well as the degree to which their own interpretations varied and changed over time, there remains a large degree of research required

such that the points of convergence and divergence with the larger panth may be better understood.

## Cross-References

- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Historiography \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Maharajah Ranjit Singh](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)

## References

1. Kaur M (1996) *Baba Sri Chand te Udasi Mat*. Navyug Publications, New Delhi
2. Parashar S (1997) *Udasi Sampradaya ka Hindi Sahitya*. Piyusha Prakashana, Delhi
3. Singh T (1988) *Gurbani dian Viakhian Pranalian*. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
4. Kaur G (1995) *Udasi Samparda da Akadamik Paripekh*. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
5. McLeod WH (1968) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. OUP, Delhi
6. Grewal JS (1998) *The Sikhs of the Panjab*, rev edn. Cambridge University Press
7. Nara GIS (1996) *Itihas Baba Sri Chand Ji Sahib ate Udasin Sampradaye*. Gobind Sadan Institute for Advance Studies in Comparative Religion, Delhi
8. Singh B (1995) *Udasi Samparda da Mishanri Paripekh*. In: Kaur G (ed) *Udasi Samparda da Akadamik Paripekh*. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
9. Singh K (2004) *A history of the Sikhs: volume one, 1469–1839*. OUP
10. McLeod WH (1980) *The Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janamsakhis*. OUP, New York
11. Nanda BS (1995) *Gurbani di Viakhia: Udasian da Yogdan*. In: Kaur G (ed) *Udasi Samparda da Akadamik Paripekh*. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala
12. Singh S (1999) *Heterodoxy in the Sikh Tradition*. ABS Publications, Jalandhar
13. Rajpal HC (1995) *Sri Matra Bani da Mul Pratipad*. In: Kaur G (ed) *Udasi Samparda da Akadamik Paripekh*. Publication Bureau Panjabi University, Patiala

---

## Udasin

- [Udasi\(s\)](#)

---

## Udasiye

- [Udasi\(s\)](#)

---

## Urbanism

- [Architecture \(Sikhism\)](#)



---

# V

---

## Validity

- ▶ [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Varna

- ▶ [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Varnashrama Dharma

- ▶ [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Veracity

- ▶ [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Verity

- ▶ [Truth \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Viakhia

- ▶ [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Vice(s), Sikhism

Gurnam Kaur Bal  
Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

---

## Synonyms

[Corruption](#); [Debauchery](#); [Degeneracy](#); [Emerit](#);  
[Foible](#); [Frailty](#); [Immorality](#); [Licentiousness](#);  
[Shortcoming](#); [Sin](#); [Weakness](#)

---

## Definition

Immoral conduct or practices harmful to society.  
Vices make a human being do things or act in  
a manner of which he is or should be ashamed of.

---

Gurnam Kaur Bal has retired.

## Introduction

In Sikhism, the ideal placed before the human being is the realization of the self. In Japuji, at the beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak rhetorically asks how to be truthful, or *sachiar*: “*kiv sachiaara hoviai?*” [1] *Sat* or *sach* is used for the Absolute or the Ultimate Reality, and the objective before the individual self is to realize the Absolute. So the term *sachiaara* is used for the ideal self that anyone ought to be. To know the objective before the self, it is necessary to know the nature of the Absolute. In Japuji, it is held that the Absolute is the One Universal Being, the Real, the Spirit, the Controller, and the Enjoyer. Beyond restraint, the Spontaneous, beyond any internal antagonisms, the Harmonious, He is Timeless, the Manifest, yet He does not come into birth and death and is self-existent. One can attune to Him through the Guru’s grace. It is further told that the Real One existed before the beginning of the ages, has existed through all ages, and shall ever be. [1] The Reality in Sikhism is referred to as *Sat Nam Karta Purakh*. *Karta Purakh* denotes creative energy or activity. As Dr. Avtar Singh points out, “The absolute is thus conceived in Sikhism as dynamic and is viewed functionally. This attribute of the creative activity has considerably influenced the ideal of self-realization.” [2] *Sachiaara* is a fully realized self. Before attaining the stage of fully realized self, a person is a Sikh, or seeker, who seeks to remove the hurdles from his/her path of self-realization. In Sikhism, *haumai* and *maya* are the obstacles of falsehood on the individual and cosmic levels, respectively. They give rise to many passions, such as *kam* (concupiscence or lust), *lobh* (covetousness or greed), *moh* (attachment and delusion), *krodh* (ire or wrath), and *ahankar* (pride). These evil propensities can distract the seeker in his/her seeking of union with the Absolute. As a scholar of Sikh ethics argues, “these propensities are considered evil not only because of their consequences of indiscrimination and praxis leading to socially undesirable results, but they are criticized also because they stand in the way of the concentration by the self on the supreme values of union

with the Spiritual Absolute.” [3] Here follows brief analyses and examinations of the above mentioned vices or propensities from the Sikh point of view.

1. *Kam* (Concupiscence): *Kam* is a noun coming from Sanskrit that has a variety of meanings such as desire, lust, and object of desire. In the most general sense, it denotes simply desire, while in the particular sense, it denotes sexual urge or concupiscence. Both of these meanings are found in Sikhism, and all the Gurus have discussed these concepts in their *bani*. *Kam* has been used and criticized by the Gurus in the sense of an unbalancing propensity. Guru Nanak says, “*Kam* (lust) is the officer who is called for advice [...] and the subject is blind and like the dead they dance to the tune.” [4] The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev says, “Lust lodges beings in hell and whirls them in innumerable births. The heart charmer wanders all over the three worlds and destroys prayer, austerity and noble conduct. The pleasure given by it is illusory, which makes human beings destitute, weak and is pervasive in every body high and low alike.” [5] Guru Arjan Dev conveys the general as well as the special meanings of *kam* by using the analogy of the elephant and the deer: “The elephant is lured by *kam* to his enslavement and becomes helpless in power of others. And the deer is lured to death caught by the sweet melodies of music. Seeing his family, the man is attracted to greed by the sense of possessiveness involved in love of *maya*. He regards it as his own, but it surely leaves him in the end.” [6] The Fifth Guru further states, “The man of lust is not satisfied with any number of women and breaks into the homes of others. He sins and then regrets, so he withers away by sorrow.” [7] And again: “Some feed their eyes on the beauty of others’ women, hid from the eyes of the world. If these be their deeds, they come to grief.” [8] These two passages convey the feeling of guilt involved in the deviant response of the person under the grip of lust. In analyzing the nature of *kam*, Dr. Avtar Singh says,

In Sikh ethics, all the three aspects, namely, its adverse effect on affective, cognitive and conative are examined. From the affective aspect under cruelty generated by it, the self may be blinded to tender feelings. As to the cognitive aspect, it may blind the perception of moral values. And cognitively speaking, it may even lead to actions of self-destruction. The second feature, which also comes to light, is the recognition of both the increase and the inhibition of action affected by this propensity. [9]

2. *Lobh*: *Lobh* means greed, avarice, or covetousness. According to Bhai Kahan Singh, “*Lobh* is a noun and it is a desire to take or possess the thing which belongs to others.” [10] In the *Bani* of Sikh scripture, it has been used in still wider meanings. Guru Nanak says, “The greedy self is never stable and at peace; it goes in all four directions. In greed, sometimes the self ascends high and at other times descends to the lowest regions.” [11] Guru Arjan Dev describes *lobh* as follows:

Avarice is attached to the great art and in many waves of passion plays. Beings rush in various ways and move about in different manners. Because of avarice, one loses shame with friends, with God, relations, mother and father. Under the influence of avarice, what is forbidden is done, what is banned for eating is consumed; it is the doing of avarice that what is not to be accomplished is accomplished. [12]

Guru Arjan Dev further points out that for the greedy person, riches become the mainstay of life. [13] According to Guru Amardas, a greedy person is not trustworthy in social relations. Such person is not loyal to anything except his/her own riches. In the end, he/she will drag others where no succor may reach. [14]

Dr. Avtar Singh says, “The psychological strength of this propensity, according to Sikhism, can be gauged from the fact that it commands instantaneous movement towards its object. Secondly, even those men who have attained some amount of perfection may be sometimes tempted by it, that is, they are required to be careful against it.” [15]

3. *Moh* (Attachment and Delusion): According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *moh* is a noun deriving from Sanskrit which implies the following

meanings: (1) *behoshi* (unconsciousness), (2) *agyan* (ignorance), (3) *sneh*, *muhabbat* (attachment), (4) *bhram*, *bhulekha* (delusion), and (5) *dukh*, *klesh* (distress). [16] According to Dr. Avtar Singh, “*Moh*, as a propensity, is understood in two meanings, though both of them are inter-related. The term is used to convey a sense of delusion, loss of consciousness, bewilderment, perplexity, error and folly. It is an inability to view the values in the right perspective. But it is also used in the sense of attachment with mundane things, and in this meaning it seeks to convey attitude of the self.” [17] In Sikhism, the term *moh* has been used to convey two meanings: one in the sense of delusion, which is described by Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha as *behoshi* or unconsciousness, and the other in the sense of an attachment to worldly things. In the *Bani* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, *moh* has been mostly used with *kutambh* (family) and *maya*. As observed by Dr. Avtar Singh, “In a way, delusion is more general and exhaustive in meaning and may include the attachment born out of wrong views.” [18] Guru Nanak says: “From *moh* is created family, and from *moh* arises all concerns of life. One should discard attachment from which evil-doing arises. When *moh* is discarded, then the holy Name will enter one’s mind and body.” [19]

4. *Karodh* (Wrath): According to Sikhism, *karodh* becomes a cause of wrong action and can obstruct the path of self-realization. It is an emotion that can destroy individuals as well as nations; it can become the cause of one’s own destruction as well as of those towards whom it is directed. Guru Nanak says, “*Krodh* destroys all evil-doers. They lose their honor and wisdom through disregard of the holy Name.” [20] Guru Arjan Dev further points out the destruction caused by *krodh*: “Wrath, thou art the root of strife and you never give rise to any compassion. Beings gripped by the passion of *krodh* are subdued and dance like apes. Yama’s minions visit them with innumerable penalties. In the company of *krodh*, men turn into devils.” [12] Similarly Bhagat Kabir observes, “Wrath,

the great clamorous being, is the commander.” [21] Dr. Avtar Singh states that wrath “is not considered in Sikhism as merely situation-inspired, but subjectively-inspired also. Second, by calling it the father of strife, it is shown to be a complex motive from which arise actions causing social conflict and strife. The actions may take different forms but they remain the same in quality, which quality is described as cruelty.” [22]

5. *Ahankar* (Pride): *Ahankar*, also written as *hankar* in Panjabi, also includes the terms *abhimān*, *haumain*, and *ghamand*. A wider study of Sikh scripture shows that *ahankar* or *haumain* is considered to be a greater evil than the other vices and a greater hurdle in the way of self-realization. There may be more than one cause of *ahankar*, such as possession of beauty and power. Guru Arjan Dev states: “Those that are proud of the intoxication of the pleasure of woman, and consider themselves powerful and aggressive, are worthless to the Divine attachments.” [23] Acts of charity or religious merit can also make a man proud. Guru Teg Bahadur says, “Man takes pride in all his pious acts of ritual bathing, fasting, and charity. But they are as worthless as the elephant’s bath.” [24] According to Guru Arjan Dev, “Egoism is the source of transmigration, the very essence of sin. It estranges friends, attaches to enmity, and makes men spread *maya*-tricks far and wide. It tries men by keeping ever on round, making them experience now pleasure and now suffering. Men walk through the fearful wilderness of doubt, and pride afflicts men with terrible and incurable maladies.” [12]

*Kam*, *lobh*, *moh*, *karodh*, and *ahankar* are mostly mentioned together in Sikh scripture. They are called *panch chor*, *panch chele*, *panch doot*, *panch chandal*, etc. – i.e., five thieves which snatch every goodness from a person. As Guru Nanak says, “The unstable mind guided by the five thieves moves, seeking to rob others’s homes, not seeking after its true home. The body’s city is ultimately demolished into a heap.” [25]

## References

1. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1
2. Dr. Avtar Singh *Ethics of the Sikhs* (2009). Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 40
3. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 50
4. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 468
5. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1378
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 671
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 672
8. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 315
9. Dr. Avtar Singh (2009), op.cit. p. 53
10. Bhai Khan Singh Nabha, *Mahan Kosh*. Punjab Language Department, Patiala, “Lobh”
11. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 876
12. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1358
13. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 914
14. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1417
15. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 57
16. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, op.cit. Moh. 1960
17. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 59
18. Ibid. p. 60
19. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 356
20. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 225
21. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1161
22. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 63
23. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1359
24. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1428
25. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1021

---

## Vichar

### ► Philosophy (Sikhism)

---

## Violence (and Nonviolence), Sikhism

Navdeep Mandair

Independent Scholar, Coventry, UK

Department of Theology and Religious Studies,  
University of Birmingham, Edgbaston,  
Birmingham, UK

## Definition

An understanding of the Sikh religion which is rooted in colonial ideas of martial race theory which get embellished during the postpartition period to signify that Sikhs are warlike and,

therefore, a threat to the security of the nation. This idea also gets enshrined in the idea of a historical break in the Sikh tradition from a peaceable sect, *Nanakpanth*, to increasingly violent tendencies which get codified with the rise of the Khalsa.

### Colonial Ideology of Militant Race Theory and Sikhism

As ethnic clichés go, the depiction of Sikhism as a militant tradition remains particularly persistent. This should not be surprising given the prevalence of martial idioms within the discourse of Sikh self-definition. This martial typology includes the use of the sword as a key emblem in Sikh iconography (the *khanda*) and its mobilization as a marker of identity (the *kirpan*), a canonical tradition in which “God” is eulogized as a warlike being (particularly in the *Dasam Granth*) and a cultural narrative largely defined by stories of valiant resistance to oppression. More recently the agitation for a separate Sikh homeland (*Khalistan*) has reproduced the militant stereotype of Sikhs through the sinister image of the insurgent and terrorist.

The debate about the origins of militancy in Sikhism is an acrimoniously contested front in the politics of cultural representation between the Western academy, particularly historians of religion and internalist voices which valorise traditional sources. Most historians of the Sikh religion take their cue on this issue from the work of W.H. McLeod whose seminal work “The Evolution of the Sikh Community” drew attention to the apparently profound divergence between the “quietist” ideology of early Sikhism (the *Nanakpanth*) and the militant signature of the tradition which followed the incumbency of the 6th Guru, *Hargobind*. [10]

Guru *Hargobind*’s innovations included wearing two swords as a symbol of Guruship denoting an office which spanned worldly (*miri*) and spiritual (*piri*) affairs, the construction of the *Akal Takht* as an emblem of Sikh political sovereignty and the mobilization of a mounted militia. These developments culminated with the radical reshaping of the Sikh community under the 10th

(and last human) Guru, *Gobind Singh* whose establishment of the *Khalsa* (the Pure) introduced an unsettling new form of initiation by the sword (*khanda ki pahul*) and institutionalized a militant appearance using five bodily markers (the *panj kakkar*). In the post-Guru period persecution, resistance, and aggrandisement became key moments in the development of the Sikh community, a story in which a narrative of violence seemed paradigmatic for its identity.

In McLeod’s view, the militant politicization of Sikhism during the seventeenth century did not arise organically from the discourse of the early Sikh community but rather coincided with a radical change in the social constituency of the *Panth* at this time to favour the agrarian and martial *Jat* caste. Crucially, he suggests, it may have been this extensive ingress of armed *Jats* into the Sikh community that prompted the unsympathetic attitude of the Mughal court towards the aggrandisement of the Sikh Gurus, an antagonism which precipitated a reciprocal cycle of fear. This remains an influential explanation among historians of the Sikh religion despite its somewhat speculative nature. [10]

However, this account has been vociferously contested by commentators from within the Sikh community. This internalist critique is largely informed by anxieties about the status of Sikhism as a revealed (and thus universal) tradition which is perceived to be diminished by the layers of social construction exposed by historical narratives of religion. Perhaps, the most cogent objection made by internalist critics to McLeod’s thesis consists in the view that despite appearances, a discursive continuity can be traced between the religious idioms of the “early” and “later” Sikh communities. Underlying this view is an argument, couched in neo-Kantian terms, about the mystical inheritance of authority in the line of Sikh Gurus, so that successive voices are seen as echoes of the original enunciation of *Nanak*. A key justification for this idea derives from the “canonical” *Vars* of *Bhai Gurdas* in which the act of succession is described as “a mixing of two lights” (“*joti jot milaaikay*”) a qualification which allows him to square the inconsistencies apparent between the reigns of the spiritual *Arjan* and the



worldly *Hargobind*. In this light, the militant accent of the later Panth is seen not as an anomalous development but a localized expression of the same vision.

A more radical rehearsal of this argument can be found in Bhogal. In contrast to an externalist critique which represents thematic and idiomatic differences between the early and late Sikh canon (the *Adi* and *Dasam Granth*) as evidence of the militant transformation of the *Panth*, Bhogal's interrogation of the perverse tropology of these texts highlights that this view may not be as obvious as it seems. By drawing attention to the regular use of political and warlike metaphors within the putatively quietist hymns of the *Adi Granth* and conversely the prevalence of tropes of love woven into the profoundly violent poetry of the *Dasam Granth*, Bhogal aims to demonstrate how the consistent ambiguity of these hymns serves to establish a discursive echo between *Guru Nanak* and *Gobind Singh*. [3]

Given this "continuity-in-difference" between the early and late Sikh traditions, the identification of a drift towards militancy in Sikhism seems not only erroneous but ideologically inspired, and as such does violence to the Sikh tradition. A compelling critique of the ideological role of McLeod's thesis has been outlined by Arvind-Pal Mandair. [5, 7] Mandair disputes the view that history serves merely to marshal evidence in a disinterested manner; he challenges its claim to objectivity by drawing attention to the epistemological continuities between the production of historical truth and (*Cartesian*) self-certainty indicating that it "possesses a distinct ontological status of [its] own." Mandair goes on to suggest that history, as metaphysics, rehearses a history of religion; that is, it connives at *Hegel's* use of religion/s as a cipher for the material unfolding of a metaphysical Ideal (Self-consciousness) in which the mark of a proper religious tradition is predicated on the ability to "think God's existence." Since the consciousness of God constitutes an interior state (*Kant*, *Schleiermacher*, *James*) the idiom of true religion is quietist and peaceful; consequently those traditions which trespass against this standard announce their own deviancy. In this light, what McLeod

represents as Sikhism is in fact a wholly revised object. The narrative of cultural change in Sikhism is mobilized as an ideological lever to manage difference, establishing an invigilated identity which cannot exceed the cosy typology of pious ascetic or holy warrior and by virtue of this act of symbolic violence extinguishes a version of tradition which contests the political with (Western) secular modernity.

The invigilation of Sikhism by the Western academy has its roots in the hegemonic supervision of Sikh tradition by British colonialism in India. The key event in this encounter was the Indian Mutiny (1857–1858). The Mutiny profoundly skewed the way in which the British ordered native difference in India; the complicity of high caste Hindus in the rebellion radically undercut the ideological role of *Aryanism*, necessitating the innovation of a new hegemonic idiom which, given the loyal military support of the Sikhs (among others), presented itself through the idea of *martial races*. Streets [15] shows comprehensively how martial race discourse established a racialized and gendered dichotomy between "good" natives, who like the British were characterized by pluck, manliness, and moral rectitude and "bad" natives who were perceived as cowardly, effeminate, and devious. Although this differentiation of native typologies was posited as an objective portrait of the Indian people because its terms were policed by a colonial vocabulary, "good" and "bad" natives merely mimicked, in their own idiom, the discourse of the British.

The Sikhs were particularly amenable to representation as a martial race given the preponderance of *Jats* in the Sikh population and the significance of militant ideals in the narrative of Sikh identity. The British identified *Khalsa* Sikhs as particularly formidable soldiers and insisted that all new recruits adopt this identity. The complicity of this recruitment policy in shaping modern Sikh orthodoxy, in which Sikhism was identified with the *Khalsa*, is the subject of an important study by Fox; [4] its conclusion, privileging army policy in the making of a new Sikh *doxa*, has been disputed by Oberoi [12] and Ballantyne [1, 2] and the consensus now emphasizes the key role of native elites in refashioning

their identity. This radical revision of Sikh discourse is identified with the (*Lahore*) *Singh Sabha* whose promotion of Khalsa orthodoxy placed them at odds with the limited reformist agenda of the (*Amritsar*) *Singh Sabha* and its tolerance of a “pluralized” Sikhism. For the *Lahore Singh Sabha* colonial army policy became a crucial lever in the conflation of Sikh identity with the Khalsa, its circumscribed narrative served to demarcate Sikhism from its Indic milieu and as a distinct *qaum* (nation) signalled its commensurability with the rational idiom of British self-definition.

### An Alternative Hermeneutics of Conflict in Sikhi

It should be noted that Oberoi’s framing of Sikh identity formation in the late nineteenth century as the unfolding of a “grand narrative,” a story whose allegedly universal status serves to discipline discursive plurality, has itself been criticized as peddling a grand narrative. Oberoi claims that the privileging of the Khalsa idiom was a departure from an Indic discourse in which a promiscuity of beliefs and practices was normal. However, Oberoi’s recourse to a *distinction* between an originally plural religious *doxa* and the specious orthodoxies encouraged by the *Raj* traps the representation of Sikhism within a Western typography of religion so that, ironically, his valorisation of precolonial narratives as free from Western interpolations requires the mobilization of this very idiom to make such a claim. Thus, although Oberoi’s work has been seminal in broadening the focus of Sikh Studies, from an emphasis on textual criticism to the interrogation of social formations, it continues to rehearse the same paradigm of symbolic violence against its subject. [12]

This ideological undercurrent is also reflected in Oberoi’s selective use of criticism. While he is alert to the leverage which the Khalsa acquired from its classification as a martial race he exhibits a curious blind spot to the possibility that this encounter levered the Khalsa into a sense of conformity with colonial discourse. [12] Given the need to prove proximity between their warlike

habits and the *civilizing* rationale of colonial militancy, the Khalsa came to be interpellated by a narrative of just war. *Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha* described this righteous war (*dharam yudh*) as “a conflict undertaken for the protection of religious principles (*dharam deh niyman dee rakhee vasteh jeh yudh hovai*)” an opinion which has been slavishly rehearsed by Sikh commentators ever since. [13]

Mandair [8, 9] draws attention to an alternative hermeneutics of conflict in Sikhism. He suggests that the canonical sources reveal a view of warfare which is profoundly excessive to any rationalization. Guru Gobind Singh draws attention to this opaque state of violence by placing contradiction at the heart of his “theology.” Thus, in the *Jap Sahib* “God” is invoked as “a wielder of the sword (*satarpane*)” and “mother of the world (*lok mata*)” is “cruel (*kalay*)” and “compassionate (*dealay*)” and exists in an “excess of pleasure (*prabhogay*)” and “perfect austerity (*sujogay*)” uncovering a sense of tension constitutive of (a) being at war with itself. Taking his cue from this cleavage of identity Mandair locates the Khalsa warrior in an economy of reference to the adversary; here the play and press of the *melee*, far from compelling submission of the opponent, enables the warrior to “open (him)self to others in the extreme intensity of the violence of war” Paradoxically, this excess of violence, by doing justice to the presence of the other, offers an important clue to the rethinking of just war; a just war insofar as it is *just* war.

In recent years, critical attention has turned to the way in which modern secular states such as India have inherited the idiom of cultural encounter established by the former colonial regime. Mandair [6] sheds light on this poisonous heritage by addressing the response of the Indian state to Sikh dissent in Punjab during the 1980s. Mandair takes his analytical cue from Derrida’s notion of the “fiduciary” nature of dialogue in colonial spaces, the presence of a law of exchange within exchange which, in promising a transparent circulation of meaning between cultures, interdicts in advance any heteronomy of sense. He suggests that the Indian state’s response to Sikh ethnonationalism rehearsed this fiduciary narrative of encounter,

where secularism as the law which enables a uniformity of space between cultures intervenes to either emasculate dissent or fashion an ‘enemy’ whose vicious rejection of a shared public culture legitimizes state violence.

## Cross-References

- [Ethics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Hargobind \(Guru\)](#)
- [Khalsa](#)
- [Mīrī Pīrī](#)
- [Nanak \(Guru\)](#)
- [Philosophy \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [Sikh Studies](#)
- [Sikhism](#)

## References

1. Ballantyne T (2002) Orientalism and race: Aryanism in the British empire. Palgrave Macmillan
2. Ballantyne T (2006) Between colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh cultural formations in an imperial world. Duke University Press
3. Bhogal B (2007) Text as sword: Sikh religious violence taken for wonder. In: Hinnells JR, King R (eds) Religion and violence in South Asia: theory and practice. Routledge
4. Fox R (1985) Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making. California University Press
5. Mandair A (2001) Thinking differently about religion and history: issues for Sikh studies. In: Shackel C, Singh G, Mandair A (eds) Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity. Curzon Press
6. Mandair A (2007) The global fiduciary: mediating the violence of religion. In: Hinnells JR, King R (eds) Religion and violence in South Asia: theory and practice. Routledge
7. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press
8. Mandair NS (2009) An approximate difference: proximity and oppression in the west’s encounter with Sikhism. *Sikh Formation* 2(5):85–101
9. Mandair NS (2009) Violent religion: revisioning the martial signature of Sikhism. Presentation at the Sikh studies consultation, American Academy of Religion meeting, Montreal, 2009
10. McLeod WH (1976) The evolution of the Sikh community. Oxford University Press
11. Nabha KS (1990[1931]) Gurushabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh. National Book Shop, Delhi
12. Oberoi H (1994) The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. Oxford University Press, Delhi
13. Singh G (2003) Sikhism and just war. In: Robinson P (ed) Just war in comparative perspective. Ashgate
14. Singh J, Singh D (1999) Sri Dasam Granth Sahib text and translation, vol 1. Heritage Publications
15. Streets H (2004) Martial races: the military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857–1914. Manchester University Press

---

## Vir Singh (Bhai)

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

Department of Religious Studies, Colby College,  
Waterville, ME, USA

## Synonyms

[Punjabi language](#); [Singh Sabha](#)

## Definition

Maker of modern Punjabi literature.

## Introduction

Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) is known as a “maker of modern Punjabi literature.” Poet, novelist, editor, exegete, historian, lexicographer, and journalist, he was the leading figure in the Singh Sabha, the Sikh renaissance movement which aspired to revive Punjabi culture on the principles of the Sikh Gurus. Born after the annexation of the Punjab (1849), Vir Singh witnessed the violent effect of the politics of language provoked by the Raj. He soon recognized the essential bond between culture and language and started to adopt a variety of literary genres. His pioneering contributions brought a revolutionary transformation in the Punjabi language. He was canonized as “Bhai,” the Brother of the Sikh Order.

## The Times

The Punjab was the last of the Indian provinces to succumb to British rule, but it was quick to respond and interact. Christian missions and English schools and colleges with their innovative curriculums generated a new consciousness. The Presbyterian mission set up a printing press, which produced translations into Punjabi from the Bible and from English literature. The first book to be printed in the Gurmukhi script was the Bible itself. Ironically, the introduction to Western ideologies under the British Raj also fostered the development of indigenous cultural traditions and the vernacular Punjabi literature.

Bhai Vir Singh was born in this rapidly changing social and cultural milieu on December 5, 1872, in the city of Amritsar. It was here that the Singh Sabha (parallel to the reform movements of the Arya Samaj in Hinduism and the Aligarh in Islam) came into being just a year later. Vir Singh's family was steeped in Sikhism. His grandfathers from both sides were scholars of Sikh sacred literature. His maternal grandfather Giani Hazara Singh was a direct descendant of the influential line of exegetes from the time of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708). He was also an inspector of schools in the church system and prepared some school textbooks in Punjabi by translating Urdu classics. Little Vir Singh spent a lot of time with him and questioned him one day as to why he only translated other people's books and did not write his own! Both exegesis and creative writing were to become his lifelong commitments.

Vir Singh attended the Church Mission School. He read English writers and philosophers and absorbed Western ideas. Simultaneously he studied Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, and their literatures. With his exposure to both Western and Asian literary models, he was able to free himself from the constricting classical structures and tropes and return afresh to his Sikh heritage and to his mother tongue Punjabi. Seizing the new energy around him, he standardized Punjabi language into a powerful medium for new literary, artistic, and social ideas. Instead of Braj that had been current amongst Sikh writers for several centuries, Bhai

Vir Singh and the other Singh Sabha intellectuals promoted it as the main medium of Sikh literary and scholarly expression. In schools and colleges they arduously fostered the teaching of Punjabi language and the use of the Gurmukhi script introduced by the Sikh Gurus.

Bhai Vir Singh was a versatile genius. He published eight collections of poetry, four novels, a play, five biographies, and nine major texts that he meticulously annotated and commented upon – while keeping up with journalism. Along with his literary and scholarly achievements, he played a major role in the establishment of organizations for the educational, political, social, and financial advancement of the Sikh community. These include the Chief Khalsa Diwan (founded in 1902), Sikh Educational Society (1908), and the Punjab and Sind Bank (1908). From different angles, Bhai Vir Singh tried to construct a distinct Sikh theological and cultural identity.

## Journalism

In collaboration with his friend Wazir Singh, he started a lithograph press in 1892 and soon thereafter launched the Khalsa Tract Society. Drawing upon parable, folktales, and scriptural quotations, the tracts were written in a simple language. Moral values of the Sikh faith and glowing historical events were their content. Prevalent social ills, superstitions, and irrational ritual were censured. They also included materials such as Punjabi textbooks for school children, culinary recipes, and, analogous to Christmas cards, *Gurpurab* cards for the birth anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus. The publications became very successful in reaching a wide audience. They mark the beginnings of the fluent literary style for modern Punjabi prose.

In November 1899, he started a Punjabi weekly newspaper, the *Khalsa Samachar*, which developed into a dynamic vehicle for the promotion of social and religious reform. Communication of news barely occupied its columns. Rather, the propagation of Singh Sabha ideology was its main objective. While advocating the spread of education and the rights of women, the newspaper passionately voiced critiques of image worship,

caste discrimination, neglect of Punjabi language, abuse by the clergy in Sikh shrines, and of pseudo-religious practices by the community. The newspaper also became a popular venue for serializing Bhai Vir Singh's own creative writings.

## Scholarship

All of Bhai Vir Singh's writing can be summed up as an exposition of Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. Early in his life he revised and expanded upon his grandfather's dictionary, *Sri Guru Granth Kosh*, originally published in 1898. He also annotated selections from the Guru Granth published in 1906 under the title *Panj Granthi Satik*. With his linguistic knowledge and meticulous research of early Sikh texts, he produced many valuable critical editions including *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* (1912), *Prachin Panth Prakash* (1914), *Puratan Janamsakhi* (1926), and *Sakhi Pothi* (1950). He even took up the challenging task of annotating Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, a voluminous poetic text on Sikh history and philosophy in Braj, which he published in 14 volumes between 1927 and 1935. He also wrote on the lives of the Gurus: *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* (1925), *Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar* (1928), and *Sri Asht Guru Chamatkar* (1952). These inspirational Chamatkars are a cross between history and hagiography and continue to be enthusiastically cited by both scholars and preachers. Late in his career, he began to work on a formal commentary on the Guru Granth Sahib and devoted several years to the project. Unfortunately, it was not completed during his lifetime and was published posthumously in seven large volumes. His exegesis of the first hymn, Japji, in 178 pages is a telling illustration of his erudite scholarship. The verses are analyzed in great length and depth; allusions, symbols, and a glossary of terms are provided; individual words are etymologically traced; references to preceding commentators are extensively made (*Japji Sahib Santhya*).

## Fiction

Imaginative works have a way of reaching deep into the psyche of their readers, so in order to reform his society and restore the ethical values of the Gurus, Bhai Vir Singh took up writing novels. They include *Sundari*, *Bijay Singh*, *Satvant Kaur*, and *Baba Naudh Singh*. Interestingly, in each of them he depicts strong female protagonists. Sundari, Sushil Kaur, Satvant Kaur, and Subhagji serve as paradigms of moral strength, spiritual sensitivity, and physical courage. They are not fairyland characters but human beings of flesh and blood embodying the Sikh writer's ideals. Their personalities, actions, and conversations remind readers of the message in the singular Divine mediated by the Sikh Gurus and of its implication for society. Widows – shunned in his patriarchal culture – appear as vital players in Bhai Vir Singh's imaginative horizon.

*Sundari* is the first novel in the Punjabi language. The story was conceived when he was still at high school, and a part of it was written then as well. Fed on stories of Sikh heroism and sacrifice from the eighteenth century, Bhai Vir Singh chose that historical period as a backdrop for most of his fictional works. His protagonist Sundari is born in a Hindu family, but converts to Sikhism, and subsequently abandons all traditional texts and mores. Sundari embodies total faith in the infinite One, she wears the five Sikh symbols, she rejects superfluous rituals, she cheerfully prepares *langar*, she fights courageously, and she even bandages and gives water to an injured soldier from the enemy camp. The author's objective is expressed in his own preface:

In writing this book our purpose is that by reading these accounts of bygone days the Sikhs should recover their faith. They should be prepared actively to pursue their worldly duty as well as their spiritual ideal... They should learn to own their high principles... and adhere to the Guru's teaching: "Recognize all humankind as one."

Bhai Vir Singh's novel is a call to action, demanding a shift in consciousness and a transformation of society.



Besides moral and religious concerns, the author also weaves in his works issues of political awareness and social reform. The themes of resistance, freedom, and republicanism resonating in *Sundari*, *Bijay Singh*, and *Satvant Kaur* spark the spirit of nationalism. Furthermore, Baba Naudh Singh, the hero of his last novel, works for social cohesiveness in his village. He advocates cooperative enterprises, better farming and better sanitation, and campaigns against caste and pollution prejudices and against the use of alcohol and tea. Popular though they were, writing novels was a passing phase, for Bhai Vir Singh did not write any after completing *Baba Naudh Singh*. He also wrote one play, *Raja Lakhdata Singh* – again, the first to appear in the Punjabi language.

## Poetry

It is in his poetry that Bhai Vir Singh's art is at its zenith. Sometimes in his novels he is so intent on presenting the best of Sikhism, that he can be overbearing and pedantic. However, in short simple poems – especially from his younger days – his deeply personal sentiments appear spontaneously and give flashes of mystical intuition. Nature, humans, and the Divine are intricately woven to create a web of subtle emotions and kaleidoscopic colors. His poems on nature express the poet's complex intimacy with it. These are not a romantic reverie. If he compares a garden with a mother, Bhai Vir Singh sensuously brings home nature's profound generosity: while a mother's love is restricted to her own children, the garden extends her comfort and love to every visitor equally. Nature is given a voice in his works, a serious voice in which human oppression and exploitation are strongly criticized. A shy violet speaks, a *chinar* tree speaks, a *kikkar* tree speaks. In different tongues, the natural phenomena ignite respect and appreciation for the earth and her powers. Destined for the axe, the helpless *kikkar* tree questions modern consumerism armed to destroy fields and jungles to set up its lucrative industries.

Like the Gurus who wrote in the poetic mode, Bhai Vir Singh made poetry an integral part of his

hermeneutic process. From his epic *Rana Surat Singh* (12,000 lines of verse modeled on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*) published in 1905 to his last collection *Mere Saiyan Jio* published in 1953, he presents the vision, the mood, and idiom of the Sikh Gurus. Several anthologies of shorter poems appeared in the 1920s: *Trel Tupke*, *Lehran de Har*, *Matak Hulare*, *Bijlian de Har*, *Preet Veena*, and *Kant Maheli*. The form of these poems was an innovation in Punjabi literature, and they became instantly popular. Romantic English poets like Wordsworth and Keats had their stylistic impact.

As in his novels, it is female figures who lyrically evoke, elucidate, and expand the Sikh scriptural message. The poet identifies with *her*. As the widow Rani Raj Kaur (in his epic *Rana Surat Singh*) journeys through the five spheres accompanied by her friend, she artistically and comprehensively brings to life Sikh mysticism delineated in the final stanzas of Guru Nanak's Japji. Similarly, when the beautiful maiden in the prime of her youth asks questions in *Jivan ki Hai* (*What is life?*), she offers a nuanced understanding of Sikh existentialism. In *Trel Tupke*, Princess Roshanara addresses visitors and readers from her grave in the Mughal gardens in Delhi to make them perceive the prime significance of temporality. And in her spiritual longing, the protagonist of *Mere Saiyan Jio* opens the reader to an experience of Divine wonder at the heart of Sikh aesthetics. Poetically Bhai Vir Singh grasped the Guru Granth, and poetically he made it diaphanous and alive for his readers. Paradoxically, as he illuminates the unique and distinct elements of Sikh theology, ethics, and aesthetics, he demonstrates that poets across religions share a fundamental affinity. For his final anthology *Mere Saiyan Jio*, he won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award.

## Legacy

He was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Punjab University in 1949 and the Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 1956.

While in school he was married to Chatar Kaur, and the couple had two daughters, Kartar Kaur and Sushil Kaur. He was very close to his younger brother Dr. Balbir Singh as well. Bhai Vir Singh was shy of disposition, yet many befriended him and were inspired by his warm presence, including poets like Dhani Ram Chatrik and Puran Singh. Ironically, this most influential Singh Sabha spokesman never gave a public speech and refused to be verbally recorded. Through his vast range of writings, his contagious love for Sikh literature and Punjabi language reached the masses. He was an avid gardener too. His home at Amritsar is surrounded by spacious gardens with an orchard, rare plants, and herbs that he planted. Bouquets from his garden daily adorn the inner sanctum of the Golden Temple. He died in the summer of 1957. The Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan established in his memory in New Delhi the following year continues to serve as a literary and cultural hub. Its central hall displays a painting of Bhai Vir Singh draped in his typical long coat, white chooridar, and a large white turban that matches his flowing white beard – standing in serene dignity beside a bush of sprightly flowers.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Amritsar](#)
- ▶ [Hermeneutics \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Modernity \(Sikhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Punjabi Language](#)

## Suggested Reading

1. Harbans Singh, Gurbachan Singh Talib. Bhai Vir Singh: poet of the Sikhs
2. Mandair A (2009) Religion and the specter of the west: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation. Columbia University Press, New York
3. Singh H (1972) Bhai Vir Singh. Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi
4. Singh BV (1985) Sundari. Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi
5. Singh N-GK (1993) Feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the transcendent. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
6. Singh N-GK (2008) Cosmic symphony: the early and later poems of Bhai Vir Singh. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi
7. Singh N-GK (2012) Of sacred and secular desire: an anthology of lyrical writings from the Punjab. I.B. Tauris, London
8. Talib GS, Singh A (eds) (1973) Bhai Vir Singh: life, times and works. Publication Bureau, Chandigarh

## Virtues (Sikhism)

Gurnam Kaur Bal

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies Department,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India  
Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies of  
Punjabi University, Brampton, ON, Canada

## Synonyms

[Aloe](#); [Cardinal virtue](#); [Distinction](#); [Excellency](#); [Grace](#); [Merit](#)

## Definition

(a) “Virtue” is a noun, a quality that gives something special worth; (b) conduct that conforms to an accepted standard of right and wrong; and (c) strength of mind to carry on in spite of danger. It is an attribute or merit or nature of something. According to a scholar of Sikh ethics, “Virtues are the qualities of self as expressed in action,” and “In some of the older Indian literature the term *guna* is also used to mean ‘good qualities, virtues, merits, excellences.’” [1] Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha defines *guna* – which becomes *gunh* in Punjabi – as follows: “a noun and from Sanskrit language. *Sift* (from Arabic, meaning attributes, good qualities, virtues, merits, excellences), *sheel*, *sila* (good conduct).” [2]

## Introduction

In Sikhism, two words *gunh* and *augunh* are used very frequently. *Gunh* means the virtues and good qualities of the self. *Augunh* is in opposition to

*gunh* and denotes evil qualities. Another word used in Sikhism is *vingunh*, which means that which is without any quality or merit. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the importance of virtue is emphasized repeatedly. Guru Nanak says: “All evils (*augunh*) are like chains thrown around the neck. These chains of evil are snapped by good qualities (*gunha*), which are the true brothers and helpers of human being. Those lacking these virtues (*gunhas*) are not honored hereafter and are castigated and pushed off.” [3] The definition of virtue, according to Sikhism, can be envisaged through the following stanza by Guru Nanak: “Make your mind the farmer and your deeds the farming, modesty the water and your body the field. Then in this field of your body, sow devotion, make content the leveling-plank and the fence of humility. This crop shall sprout by devotion and grace and then your home will be fortunate.” [4] Guru Nanak’s analogy of the farm and the farmer shows how the cultivation of virtue is considered vital to the realization of the supreme ideal; Guru Nanak states this idea more straightforwardly in Japuji, saying, “Without the cultivation of virtues devotion is not possible. [5]” In Sikh thought, virtues have been regarded as essential qualities for the self to attain the love of the Divine, for, as Guru Nanak says, it is in “using magic spells of virtues that one may attain the Beloved.” [6]

According to the Gurus, it is in the congregation of *gurmukhs* (*sangat* or *sati-sangat*) or virtuous people that one can learn to acquire virtues. Dr. Avtar Singh, while talking about the cultivation of ethical virtues according to Sikhism, says: “The virtues, according to the Gurus, may be learnt and cultivated through social communication with the virtuous.” [7] Guru Nanak says: “In noble company, one becomes noble; striving for virtues, he/she washes off his/her demerits.” [8] Thus, the sharing of merits through good company is not only appreciated but encouraged; Guru Nanak further states: “If one should bear a casket of fragrant merits (*gunh*), one must open it occasionally to take the fragrance in. Should one’s friends bear merits, these must be shared. Sharing merits, discarding demerits one should tread life’s way. Wearing silks of merits, decking oneself, one should occupy one’s place on the stage.” [9]

Sikhism lays a great stress on the cultivation of virtues on the journey toward self-realization. Some of the very important virtues which are considered indicative of “moral excellence” are *sianap* (wisdom), *sati* (truthfulness), *sanjam* (temperance), *udam* (courage), *niaan* (justice), *halimi* (humility), and *santokh* (contentment).

### Wisdom (*Sianap*)

Wisdom is the most fundamental virtue which plays an important role in the path to self-realization according to the Sikh ethics. According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, “the word *sianap* is a noun that denotes accomplishment, virtue, intelligence, and elegance, while *siana* comes from the same root and means “knowledgeable (*giani*), intelligent, and wise,” or someone who displays these qualities. In the *Mahan Kosh*, it is further explained that the word “*siana*” is derived from an Arabic word *shaan*, which means “a man of deeper insight and broader vision.” [10] According to one scholar, “The terms which are generally used to denote wisdom and the wise man are *gian* and *giani* respectively. But other terms such as *mut*, *mun*, *budh* and *bibek budh* are used also to convey the ideal of wisdom or the sense of discrimination.” [11]

In Sikhism, *sianap* is related to reason (*soch*, *vichar*, and *aql*), and a *siana*, or wise person, uses his/her reason to understand things in their proper perspective. A *siana* uses his/her reason on two levels. On one level, he/she tries to understand the world around him/her, which is related to cause and effect. On this level, what he/she aims at makes him/her worldly wise. On the second level, he/she tries to understand the Truth as it is revealed in the *shabad* or *bani*; he/she tries to understand the higher Truth through his/her reason. The important point related to wisdom, or any virtue, is to convert these virtues into action. Guru Nanak Dev, while talking about the stages of life, says that “man’s reason works in two ways. When guided by immediate gain, man commits wrongs and his/her intellect and wisdom desert him/her. But if he follows the Guru’s instructions along with his/her reason, he/she gains wisdom of a higher level”. [12] In talking about reason and the

supreme wisdom acquired through it, Guru Arjun Dev links these ideas with God's grace: he explains that "wisdom, which is a mental faculty from one perspective and a power of man from another perspective, is achieved with God's grace when wisdom rises to the higher level where one can understand God's will". [13]

### Truthfulness (*Sati*)

Truthfulness or veracity is another virtue that is valued in Sikhism. While commenting upon truthfulness, Dr. Avtar Singh warns that, "Truthfulness, however, ought to be distinguished from 'Truth' in the metaphysical sense since the term *sach* is used in the Adi Granth both in the ethical sense of truthfulness as well as for the Absolute 'Dynamic-existent', or Reality." He further remarks: "Truth in the metaphysical sense, when used for the Absolute, becomes the Supreme Ideal of the ethics." [14] *Sach* or *sat* has been used in three different ways in Sikhism: first, as an attribute of the Absolute or, as mentioned above, "for the Absolute 'Dynamic-existent,'" which is the Supreme Ideal to be achieved by the self; second, as a quality of a proposition that has the capacity for guiding conduct; and third, as a moral virtue. In stressing truthfulness as part of one's conduct, Guru Nanak says, "Realization of Truth is higher than everything else but still higher is truthful living." [15] Bhai Gurdas says that "every religious action is below Truth but "*sachu acharu*," or Truthful living, is above every action". [16] Dr. Avtar Singh, quoting Hartman, says, "It is in this sense of 'agreement of one's word with one's thought, or conviction' to which we may add, 'the agreement with one's acts.'" [17] Guru Ramdas puts the abovementioned thought in another way when he says, "How may we defiled ones find union with you? We have one thing on our tongues and something quite different in our hearts. We are the unfortunate and the false." [18]

### Justice (*Niaon*)

Justice is another important ethical virtue in Sikhism. According to Sikh revelation, God is One and

the only Reality, and all other expanse is His creation. He grants boons and shows His grace to all. In this sense, all are equally entitled to justice. According to Dr. Avtar Singh, "the virtue of justice is referred to in terms of social equality. This is seen when Sikhism seeks to ensure equality by rejection of the caste system which had come to be regarded as a symbol of inequalities, whatever might have been the original idea behind the social division. The Gurus recognize that justice without social equality is meaningless. It is this virtue whereby a man regards other men as the social equals in all respects—an important characteristic of social relationship." [19] The caste system is debunked by Guru Nanak's identification of himself with the lowest of the low; he says that "God's grace is bestowed on the land where the poor are cherished and respected". [20] Bhagat Kabir asserts this principle by rhetorically asking that "if the same blood is running through the veins of all, how can anyone be termed high or low on the basis of one's caste?". [21] The virtue of justice means respect for the rights of others and nonexploitation of others. Guru Nanak says, "To grab the rights of others is as evil as pork to the Muslim and cow's flesh to the Hindu." [22] Referring specifically to the social equality of women with men, Guru Nanak says that "man takes birth through woman and that social relationships and the whole social system are because of women". [23]

### Temperance (*Sanjam*)

Temperance is another virtue which is considered important in Sikhism for regulating a person's conduct: "This virtue is regarded both as moderation and as regulation or direction of the lower by the higher." [24] In Sikhism, extreme methods of asceticism like Hatha Yoga or other austerities are rejected for the control of self. Instead, Guru Nanak suggests a path of self-discipline that is in-between excessive indulgence and austerity. In answer to the query of the *sidhas*, Guru Nanak says, "I sleep a little and eat a little. This is the quintessence I have found." [25] In the *bani*, the words *sat sanjam* or *sach sanjam* are often used together to convey the idea that temperance

is a virtue in which *sat* regulates or predominates the other aspects of the individual.

## Courage

As Dr. Avtar Singh remarks, “Courage is a complex virtue. It embodies both fortitude as well as valour and although these two are grouped under one character they involve different responses to the situation. [. . .] Courage tempered with poise is the proper moral response.” [26] In the *bani* of the Guru Granth Sahib, the words used for the courageous and brave person are *sura*, *surbir*, *nidar*, and *nirbhau*. We find many references where man is asked to fight for justice, faith, and goodness to others. Guru Nanak says, “If you seek to engage in the game of love then step into my street with thy head placed on thy palm, while to this stepping sacrifice your head ungrudgingly.” [27] Fearlessness is an attribute of the Ultimate and the seeker of Truth should be like Him, the Fearless.

## Humility (*Halimi*)

In Sikhism, humility is considered important as it consists of having a humble estimate of one’s merits. Socially, it consists of not expecting or demanding any approbation or subservience from others in recognition of one’s merits. The words used in the *bani* of the Guru Granth Sahib to describe this virtue of humility are *garib*, *nich*, and *nimana*. The importance of virtue is evident from the saying of the Guru, “To me, Nanak, who is low, helpless, ignorant, devoid of merit or qualities, the Lord showed grace and made me His own.” [28]

## Contentment (*Santokh*)

Contentment is another very important virtue that the Gurus mention along with other two virtues – for example, *sat santokh vicharo*, which means

“truth, contentment, and reflection,” or *sat santokh sanjam*, which means “truth, contentment, and temperance.” Guru Ramdas says, “Make contentment thy father.” [29] The father provides protection to the child and eradicates fear – so, according to the Guru, contentment is to provide the security of equipoise in every situation, in both success and failure. Man may be fearful of life after this world, but Guru Arjan Dev says, “The world is contented for the Guru has given the message of emancipation to all.” [30] The above saying of the Guru shows that contentment is indicative of emancipation from fear or misgivings about salvation.

## References

1. Dr. Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*. Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 78
2. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Mahan Kosh*, Punjab Language Department, Patiala, “gunh”
3. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 595
4. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 595
5. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 4
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 725
7. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 79
8. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 414
9. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 786
10. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, op.cit. “sianan, sianap”
11. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 81
12. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 76
13. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 380
14. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 89
15. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 62
16. Bhai Gurdas, Varan, (S.G.P.C., Amritsar), 18/19
17. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit., p. 89
18. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 528
19. Dr. Avtar Singh, p. 91
20. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 15–16
21. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 463–464
22. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 473
23. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 97
24. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 939
25. Dr. Avtar Singh, op.cit. p. 101
26. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412
27. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 815
28. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 815
29. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 172
30. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 629



---

# W

---

## Weakness

- [Vice\(s\), Sikhism](#)

---

## World Religion

- [Diaspora \(and Globalization\)](#)

---

## Word

- [Shabad \(Word\), Sikhism](#)

---

# Y

---

## Yatra

- [Pilgrimage \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Yuga

- [Time \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Yoga

- [Meditation \(Sikhism\)](#)

# Z

---

## Zaat

- [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Zaatibad

- [Caste \(Sikhism\)](#)

---

## Zafarnama

Christopher Shackle  
SOAS, University of London, London, UK

### Definition

The *Zafarnama* (“Epistle of victory”) is a short composition in Persian verse generally attributed to the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh (ca. 1708).

### The Test

The *Zafarnama* takes the form of a missive addressed by Guru Gobind Singh to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707). It is included at the end of the large collection of poetry associated with Guru Gobind Singh known as the

Dasam Granth, ([4, 5], pp. 676–691) where it is immediately followed by the *Hikaitan* (“Anecdotes”), 11 Persian poems similar in size, style and meter to the *Zafarnama* but of a controversially different character.

### Setting and Content

Unlike most of the Sikh scriptural writings, the *Zafarnama* (Z) is quite closely tied to historical events well attested in other sources. ([2, 3, 4], pp. 139–149) Guru Gobind Singh had long been in conflict with the Hindu rulers whose states in the Punjab hills surrounded his capital at Anandpur. In 1704, a substantial Mughal army was dispatched to the region and in conjunction with the forces of the hill rajas laid siege to the Guru’s headquarters. On December 21, the Guru was finally induced to leave Anandpur by the Mughal commander who promised him safe conduct but then immediately attacked the Sikhs, who were overwhelmed at the battle of Chamkaur on December 22. Although he lost his two elder sons in the conflict, Guru Gobind Singh himself managed to escape southwards to the Malwa region of southern Punjab, where the *Zafarnama* (Z) is believed to have been written at some time during 1705.

An opening set of verses invokes the omnipotence of God (Z1-12). These are followed by the letter proper, headed *dastan* (“story”), beginning with a denunciation of the faithlessness of the

Mughal commander whose oath falsely sworn on the Koran caused the Guru to abandon Anandpur (Z13-18). This leads to a vivid summary evocation of the Sikhs' heroic struggle against superior odds at Chamkaur, culminating in the Guru's escape (Z19-44).

The central part of the *Zafarnama* returns to the reiterated theme of outrage at the commander's betrayal of his oath (Z45-50). The emperor Aurangzeb is finally addressed directly and reminded of the Koran-sworn undertakings he had given to the Guru (Z51-58), who professes himself ready to obey the emperor's summons to present himself at the latter's headquarters in the Deccan (Z59-63). Aurangzeb is then called upon in God's name to practice truth and justice and to give the Guru his due (Z64-77). Reminding the emperor of the threat he himself continues to pose in spite of the death of all his sons at the hands of the Mughals, the Guru states how the small regard in which he holds Aurangzeb and his promises is balanced only by his personal loyalty to the emperor's son Muazzam (Z78-88).

The concluding section opens with ironic praise of Aurangzeb's supposed royal virtues, which are sharply contrasted with the Guru's record as a scourge of the idol-worshipping Hindu hill rajahs (Z89-95). The *Zafarnama* then ends with a sententious reminder of earlier themes, including statements of the power of destiny and greater power of God, and of the inability of superior physical force to subdue those who like the Guru enjoy divine favor and protection (Z96-111).

## Authorship and Character

The very heterogeneous character of the contents of the Dasam Granth has caused continuing controversy over which of them are properly to be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh himself. [6, 11] Difficult questions have been raised for many Sikhs by, for instance, the inclusion within this semi-scriptural collection of such apparently Hindu-oriented texts as the extended retellings of divine mythology in the *Chaubis Avatar* or such

apparently secular material as the sometimes ribald tales of the wiles of women collected in the *Charitropakhyan*. The modern consensus has been to attribute these very substantial parts of the Dasam Granth not to the Guru but to members of the extensive circle of poets who wrote under his patronage.

By contrast, however, the *Zafarnama* has been generally agreed to be the authentic work of the Guru himself. It was already included in the earliest manuscripts of the Dasam Granth, and while it has no internal signature, it is introduced by the initial formula *sri mukhvak patishahi 10* ("spoken by the Tenth Ruler"). While some critics have questioned its attribution to the Guru, it is difficult to see who else at the time might have composed a work which seems so clearly to exemplify the forceful dignity that is the mark of Guru Gobind Singh's self-definition of his role as a divinely appointed defender of righteousness. And while elsewhere Braj Bhasha Hindi was his preferred medium of poetic expression, a training in Persian would also have been an important component of his princely upbringing. It is true that there are instances in the *Zafarnama* where the language is incorrect by classical standards, but some of these may be attributed to uncertain transmission of the text (usually in the Gurmukhi script), while others may be compared with the Guru's idiosyncratic Persian coinages in other texts, notably the *Jap Sahib* which opens the Dasam Granth.

Whether it was actually sent as a letter to Aurangzeb is more questionable. While contemporary Mughal records do mention an exchange of correspondence at the time between the Guru and the emperor, the content of these letters is not described. Certainly the elaborate descriptions in later Sikh tradition of the miraculously powerful effects of the *Zafarnama* upon Aurangzeb may be classed as pious elaborations rather than as history. A careful reading of the *Zafarnama* indicates that it may be understood not so much as a piece of actual correspondence with the imperial court (which would at the time have indeed been written in Persian, but in prose) as an idealized poetic missive conveying the Guru's message in suitably exalted terms with unmistakable reference to the

Persian poetic tradition which formed so important a reference point for the elite culture of Mughal India. ([12], pp. 163–167) Thus, while brief in compass, the *Zafarnama* clearly aligns itself through its chosen meter and carefully pitched antique style with the great eleventh-century Persian epic, the long *Shahnama* (“Book of kings”) by Firdausi, [8] whose classic narration of the wars of the kings of ancient Iran with their hereditary foes provides so many telling instances of how true rulers should behave in the face of adversity and of how other sovereigns have been found inadequate to maintain the values of true kingship and have instead resorted to treachery and deceit. Firdausi is indeed explicitly quoted at one point in the *Zafarnama* (Z80), and at numerous points, less direct allusions to the events of his epic serve to appropriate this master text of Mughal cultural values to underpin the message that real sovereignty now lies with Guru Gobind Singh, the destroyer of idols who is true to his mission even in apparently disastrous defeat, rather than with Aurangzeb whose betrayal of his Koran-sworn oaths guarantees that his apparent power will be destroyed by the inexorable workings of fate.

Although the Persian language and the Persian literary context are now forgotten in India, the enduring power of this message has ensured a continuing popularity among Sikhs for the *Zafarnama*, which is accessible through numerous translation into modern Punjabi ([5, 9, 10], pp. 41–79) and English translations. [7, 12, 13] Only one verse has retained proverbial currency in the original language: *chu kar az hamah hilate dar guzasht, halal ast burdan ba-shamshir dast* (Z22) “When matters pass all other means, it is allowed to take up arms.” Often taken, somewhat out of its original context in the narrative of the battle of Chamkaur, as a general sanction for the Sikh community to take direct action when more peaceful strategies have failed, this is actually an almost direct quotation from the thirteenth-century Persian poet Sa’di, whose books of practical instruction in survival skills lay for centuries at the heart of the international Persian curriculum.

## Related Texts

Whether regarded in the Braj Bhasha context of the Dasam Granth or against the more general background of Persian literature, the *Zafarnama* is a strikingly original composition. There is however one Persian text which is often cited in modern sources as a close parallel, the so-called *Fatehnama*, also meaning “Epistle of Victory.” ([1, 10], pp. 80–95; [14]) Written in the same meter and style and originally of similar length to the *Zafarnama*, this too purports to be a missive addressed by Guru Gobind Singh to Aurangzeb. On external grounds alone, however, it must be regarded with some suspicion. The original document is alleged to have been discovered in Patna in the late nineteenth century by a Babu Jagannath Das, who later lost it and was able several decades later to recall from memory only 24 verses (one of which is incomplete). Attempts have been made to suggest either that it was a draft of the *Zafarnama* or else that it was an earlier item in the Guru’s correspondence with the emperor. But its markedly more hostile tone and suspiciously more polished imitation of the style of the *Shahnama* suggest that it was probably a later pious fabrication.

Different questions of authenticity have been raised around the 11 Persian *Hikaitan* which immediately follow the *Zafarnama* at the end of the Dasam Granth ([5, 6], pp. 690–785) where they are sequentially numbered as *Zafarnama* 2–12. In early manuscripts, they are linked to the *Zafarnama* by a set of Braj Bhasha verses. ([12], p. 174) Another intextual linkage is suggested by the verses on the inexorable subjection of royal power to death in *Hikait* 8–42–45. For most modern readers, however, the secular character of the *Hikaitan* aligns them within the Dasam Granth rather with the tales of women in the Braj Bhasha *Charitropakhyan*, especially given the close thematic parallels between *Hikaitan* 4, 5, 9 and *Charitropakhyan* 52, 267, 290, respectively. As such, they are usually placed firmly in the category of inauthentic compositions which are not to be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, and they are accordingly omitted from most modern editions of the Dasam Granth. [15]



With the recent growth of interest in the Dasam Granth as a subject of scholarly inquiry, it has begun to be suggested that such questions of authenticity, which are anyway probably insoluble, may offer a less fruitful approach than the search for understandings of the interrelationships between its constituent texts. [11] Here perhaps the parallels across the small Persian inventory and the much larger corpus of Braj Bhasha texts which are so obviously present in the case of the *Hikaitan* and the *Charitropakhyan* may also hold true of the relationship between the *Zafarnama* and the equally remarkable *Bachittar Natak*, in which Guru Gobind Singh describes his earlier mission in terms of Indian mythology rather than those of Persian ideals of kingship. The ambitious scale of this combined undertaking serves further to emphasize that the importance of the *Zafarnama* is as a key to the understanding of the Sikh conception of the relationship between sacred and secular power.

### Cross-References

- [Dasam Granth](#)
- [Gobind Singh \(Guru\)](#)
- [Gurmukhi script](#)
- [Hukumnama](#)
- [Persian Sources \(and Literature\) on Sikhs](#)

### References

1. Ahuja JK (1999) *The Fatehnama of Guru Gobind Singh*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai
2. Fenech LE (2013) *The Sikh Zafar - namah of Guru Gobind Singh*. OUP, New York
3. Grewal JS (1972) *The Zafarnama of Guru Gobind Singh*. In: Grewal JS (ed) *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. GNU, Amritsar
4. Grewal JS, Bal SS (1967) *Guru Gobind Singh*. Panjab University, Chandigarh
5. Jaggi RS, Jaggi GK (eds) (1999) *Sri Dasam-Granth Sahib, path-sampadan ate viakhia*. Gobind Sadan, New Delhi
6. Loehlin CH (1967) *The Granth of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa brotherhood*. Lucknow Publishing House, Lucknow
7. Makin GS (trans) (2005) *Zafarnamah (Epistle of victory)*. Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana
8. Melikian-Chirvani AS (2002) *The Shah-name echoes in Sikh poetry*. *Bull Asia Inst* 16:1–23
9. Nara IS (1985) *Safarnama and Zafarnama* (trans: Singh R). Nara Publications, New Delhi
10. Padam PS (ed) (1989) *Zafarnama te panj hor name*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar
11. Rinehart R (2011) *Debating the Dasam Granth*. OUP, New York
12. Shackle C (2008) *Zafarnama*. *J Punjab Stud* 15:161–180
13. Shackle C, Mandair A (eds) (2005) *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus*. Routledge, London/New York
14. Singh G (ed) (1949) *Ma'akhiz-i tavarikh-i Sikkhan*. Sikh History Society, Amritsar
15. Singh R (ed) (1988) *Shabadarath Dasam Granth sahib*. Punjabi University, Patiala

---

## List of Entries

### A

Accuracy  
Acquaintance  
Actuality  
Aesthetics (Sikhism)  
Akali  
Akali Dal  
Akali/Akali Dal  
Akhand Path  
Alue  
Amar Das (Guru)  
Amritdhari  
Amritsar  
Anand Sahib  
Anandpur Sahib Resolution  
*Anhad Nad*  
Anna Prasanam  
Annaprashana  
Antithesis  
Apprehension  
Architecture  
Architecture (Sikh)  
Architecture (Sikhism)  
Argumentation  
Arjan (Guru)  
Art  
Art (Sikh)  
Art (Sikhism)  
Ashta Samskara  
*Atma*  
*Aum*  
Authority (Sikhism)  
Autonomy for Punjab

### B

Banda Bahadur  
Bani  
Belief  
Bhagats  
Bhagti  
Bhagti (Bhakti), Sikhism  
*Bhakti (Bhagti)*  
Bhindrawallah  
Blue Star (Operation)  
*Bodhi*  
Bowing Bards  
British Empire  
*Buddhi*  
Buildings

### C

Calendar (Nanakshahi), Sikhism  
Cardinal Virtue  
Caste (Sikhism)  
Chief Khalsa Diwan  
Coherence  
Colonial-Era Punjab  
Colonialism  
Comparative Study of Religions  
Comprehension  
Connection  
Consciousness  
Consciousness (Sikhism)  
Corruption  
Creation  
Creator

**D**

Dal Khalsa  
 Dalip Singh, Maharaja  
 Darshan  
 Dasam Granth  
 Dastaar  
 Dates  
 Death (Sikhism)  
 Debauchery  
 Deduction  
 Degeneracy  
 Desi and Margi  
 Design  
 Devotionalism  
 Dhadi Var  
 Dhadi(s)  
 Dharam  
 Dharam (Sikhism)  
*Dhyana*  
 Dialectic  
 Diaspora  
 Diaspora (and Globalization)  
 Distinction  
 Divisions  
 Dreams (Sikhism)  
 Dumulla

**E**

Embodiment  
 Emerit  
 Enlightenment  
 Ethics (Sikhism)  
 Ethnography  
 Exactness  
 Excellency

**F**

Fact  
 Factuality  
 Faith  
 Fate (Destiny), Sikhism  
 Festivals  
 Festivals (Sikhism)  
 Foible  
 Folklore (Sikhism)  
 Frailty

**G**

Genuineness  
 Ghadar Movement  
 Ghaddhar  
 Ghadhar  
 Globalization  
 Gobind Singh (Guru)  
 Golden Temple  
 Grace  
 Groups  
 Guide  
 Guide (Sikh)  
 Gurbani Kirtan  
 Gurbani-Keertan  
 Gurbani-Kirtan  
 Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai  
 Gurdwara Reform Movement  
 Gurgaddi  
 Gurmat  
 Gurmat Sangeet  
 Gurmatta  
 Gurmat-Sangeet  
 Gurmukh  
 Gurmukhi Script  
 Guru  
 Guru Amar Das  
 Guru Granth Sahib  
 Gutka

**H**

Har Krishan, Guru  
 Har Rai, Guru  
 Hargobind (Guru)  
 Hermeneutics (Sikhism)  
 Historical Research on Sikhism  
 Historical Sources (Sikhism)  
 Historiography (Sikhism)  
 History (Sikhism)  
 Hukumnama  
 Hymns of the Sikh Guru

**I**

Image  
 Immorality  
 Imperial Power and Sikh Tradition  
 Indian Army

Induction  
Inference  
Insight  
Instruction  
Intellection  
Intelligence

## **J**

Janamsakhis  
*Japa*  
Japji  
Japji Sahib  
Jati  
Jivan-Mukti  
Juga

## **K**

Kaal  
Kabir  
*Karam*  
Karma  
Karnavedha  
Keertan  
Keshkee  
Khalistan  
Khalsa  
Kirtan  
Kirtan (Sikhism)  
Kirtaniya  
Kirtankar  
Knowledge (Gian), Sikhism

## **L**

Law and Justice (Sikhism)  
Legal Orders  
Legitimacy  
Licentiousness  
Linkage  
Logic (Sikhism)  
Love  
Love (Sikhism)

## **M**

Mahant  
Maharaja Dalip Singh  
Maharajah Ranjit Singh

*Man*  
*Mantra*  
Marriage (Sikhism)  
Martyrdom (Sikhism)  
Maryada  
Meditation (Sikhism)  
Merit  
Migrant  
Migration, Sikh  
Mind (Sikhism)  
Mirasi(s)  
Mīrī Pīrī  
Misl(s)  
Modern  
Modernism  
Modernity (Sikhism)  
Moksha  
Mughal/Sikh Relations  
Music  
Music (Sikh Popular and Religious)

## **N**

Naam  
*Nadar*  
*Nam Japna*  
*Nam Simran*  
Nam (Sikhism)  
Namadeva  
Namdeo  
Namdev  
Nanak (Guru)  
Niramalas  
Niramale  
Nirgun Bhakti  
Nirmala(s)  
Nirmale  
*Nitnem*

## **O**

Orientalism (Sikhism)

## **P**

Pagri  
Parchar  
Performance  
Persian Literature

Persian Sources (and Literature) on Sikhs  
 Philosophy  
 Philosophy (Sikhism)  
 Pilgrimage (Sikhism)  
 Poetry  
 Poetry of the Sikh Gurus  
 Political Authority  
 Postcoloniality  
 Prachar  
 Precision  
 Punjab  
 Punjabi Language  
 Punjabi Literature

## R

Raag  
 Raaga  
 Rababi  
 Race (Sikhism)  
 Ragas (Sikhism)  
 Ragis (in Sikh Kirtan Tradition)  
 Rahit  
*Rahit Maryādā* (Code of Conduct), *Sikhism*  
*Rahit-Namas*  
 Raidas  
 Ramdas (Guru)  
 Rasa  
 Ratiocination  
 Rationale  
 Ravidas (Raidas)  
 Reality  
 Reason  
 Reason (Sikhism)  
 Reasoning  
 Reform and Revivalism  
 Relationship  
 Relics (Sikhism)  
 Religious Leader  
 Religious Practices  
 Revivalism  
 Rites  
 Ritual (Sikhism)  
 Rituals  
 Rohidas  
 Ruhidas

## S

Sabad  
 Sabada  
 Sabd  
 Sabda  
 Saint  
 Samskara  
 Samskara (Sikhism)  
 Sanity  
 Sankhara  
 Sanskara  
 Sant Sipahi  
 Sant(s)  
 Sants  
 Sapna  
 Savant  
 Scripture (Sikhism)  
 Seasons  
 SECTS (Sikhism)  
 Sense  
 Sensory Experience  
 Seva  
*Seva* (Service), *Sikhism*  
 Shabad (Word), *Sikhism*  
 Shabad Kirtan  
 Shabada  
 Shahadat  
 Shaheed  
 Shahidi  
 Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee  
 (SGPC)  
 Shodasha Samskara  
 Shortcoming  
 Sikh  
 Sikh Homeland  
 Sikh Musicology  
 Sikh Nationalism  
 Sikh Sovereignty  
 Sikh Studies  
 Sikh Theology  
 Sikhi  
*Sikhism*  
 Sikhs Abroad  
 Sikhs and Empire  
 Sikhs in the British Empire  
*Simran*



**Sin**

Singh Sabha  
Singh Sabha/Reform Movements  
Singh Sabhas  
Snana  
Sri Akal Takht Sahib  
Sri Darbar Sahib  
Sri Harmandir Sahib  
Supna  
Syllogism  
Symbols  
Symbols (Sikhism)  
Synthesis

**T**

Takhat  
Takhata  
Takhts  
Takseem  
Tat Khalsa  
Teeka  
Tegh Bahadur (Guru)  
The Adi Granth  
Thesis  
Time  
Time (Sikhism)  
Transcendental Meditation  
Transnationalism  
Transnationalism (Sikhism)  
Truth (Sikhism)  
Turban (Sikhism)

**U**

Udasi(s)  
Udasin  
Udasiye  
Urbanism

**V**

Validity  
Varna  
Varnashrama Dharma  
Veracity  
Verity  
Viakhia  
Vice(s), Sikhism  
Vichar  
Violence (and Nonviolence), Sikhism  
Vir Singh (Bhai)  
Virtues (Sikhism)

**W**

Weakness  
Word  
World Religion

**Y**

Yatra  
Yoga  
Yuga

**Z**

Zaat  
Zaatibad  
Zafarnama